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DISCOURSES

ON THE

WHOLE BOOK OF ESTHER.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

SERMONS,

ON PARENTAL DUTIES, ON MILITARY COURAGE, AND ON THE IMPROVEMENT TO BE MADE OF THE ALARM OF WAR.

BY GEORGE LAWSON, D. D.
MINISTER OF THE ASSOCIATE CONGREGATION, SELKIRK.

SECOND EDITION,
CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

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DISCOURSES

ON

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

INTRODUCTION.

EVERY word of God is precious. Let no man, therefore, pretend that there are some parts of the Bible from which he can derive little instruction. The blame is in yourselves, if you do not find treasures more precious than gold, in that inexhaustible mine of sacred knowledge, the Holy Scripture.

But you will perhaps say, We find little mention of the name or attributes of God, and still less mention of Christ and of salvation, in some books, or portions of books, in the Old Testament. In the whole book of Esther, for instance, the name of God does not once occur. Can that book come from God, or give us instruction in the knowledge of him, that does not once make mention of his name?

The first question here to be considered is, Whether we have any good proof that this book is a

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book of God? If we have not, let us hold it in that estimation which it appears to us, after ing it, to deserve. If we have, we ought to be sured, that it is profitable for doctrine, for rep for correction, for instruction in righteousness; in short, that it is every way worthy of its di Author, and of the gracious design for which he caused his word to be published to the sons of men.

That it is divinely inspired, you know and confess. You have the same reason, indeed, for believing that it comes from God, that you have for believing the divine inspiration of the other books of the Old Testament. To the Jews, says Paul, were committed the oracles of God. From the Jews, who lived in the days of Christ, and of his apostles, we are authorised to receive as authentic whatever books were acknowledged by their church as parts of the divine oracles. They have put into our hands the book of Esther, as well as the books of Moses: And although some have pretended, that the Jews treat this book with less respect than their other scriptures, because the name of God is not found in it; yet learned men, better informed on the subject, assure us, that no book of scripture, after the books of the lawgiver, is held in higher estimation by the Jews, than the book of Esther.

Is the name of God not in this book? If the wonderful works of God declare his name to be near, it is written in large characters in the book of Esther, which gives us an account of one of the most wonderful interpositions of God in ancient times, for the salvation of his people.

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Is the name of our Lord Jesus Christ not to be found in this book? Are we not taught very plainly by Moses, and the prophets who followed him, that the Son of God, the Angel of his presence, in whom his name is, was the Saviour of Israel in every age*? Was he not, then, the Author of the great deliverance wrought for his people in the days of Esther? and do we not learn the glory of his grace, and wisdom, and power, from this work of his hand?

For what end did God cause his ancient oracles to be written? Asaph informs us, Psal. lxxviii. 5. —8. And do we find any of the books of the Old Testament better fitted for the important purpose there mentioned? Do we not learn from this book, if we are not absolutely unteachable, to "set our hope in God, and not to forget the works of God, but to keep his commandments?"

But let us read this book with attention. Let us consider the instructions plainly conveyed in it to our minds. Let us meditate upon the glorious works recorded in it. Let us supplicate God to open our eyes, that we may see the wonderful things of his law. Then shall we know whether this book is from God or not. In the mean time, we need not trouble ourselves with the question, Why the name of God is not to be found, in the letters of it, in this book? It is found in it in such a form, as will strike with admiration, and inspire with holy affections, all who have learned that "the Lord is known by the judgements which he executes."

* Exod. iii. 23.; Gen. xlviii. 6. 7.; Psal. lxviii. 18. 19. Compare Eph. iv. 9.

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DISCOURSE I.

AHASUERUS'S FEAST.—CHAP. i. 1.—10.

VER. 1.—*Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces),*

IT is the opinion of those who seem to have considered the matter with most attention, that the Ahasuerus here mentioned was Artaxerxes Longimanus, one of the most humane and most prosperous of the kings of Persia, of a quite different character from the Ahâsuerus spoken of in the third chapter of the book of Ezra.

This prince was lord of a great part of the world. He reigned over an hundred and twenty-seven provinces, some of them large enough to have made powerful kingdoms. What rich gifts hath God often bestowed on men who know him not! Think not, however, that God is more liberal to his enemies than to his friends. Some of the vilest of men possessed all the great and large dominions of the Persian empire. But if God has bestowed on you the least measure of true faith, of unfeigned love, of unaffected humility, he hath bestowed on you treasures of inestimably greater value than all the possessions of Artaxerxes Longimanus, or of Nero. It would be unreasonable and impious to think, that his donations to such men as the last-mentioned prince,

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prince, the disgrace of thrones, could bear any proportion in value with his gifts to the poorest and meanest of the objects of his special love. The richest of earthly blessings are but curses to those who are not enabled to make a good use of them. Some of the objects of the love of God in Christ Jesus are naked, and destitute of daily food, till they are supplied by the hand of charity; but they are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ."

"Ahasuerus reigned from India even to Ethiopia:" A vast extent of country, much larger than the dominions of David or Solomon, when they reached "from the river to the ends of the earth," or of the land. Why, then, did God so often speak of the vast extent of dominion given to these princes, as a testimony of his special favour, when he has given much larger dominions to many who called not on his name? The extent of the dominions of David and Solomon were pledges of his kindness to them, as kings of his own people, to whom God shewed forth his covenant-faithfulness, not only in giving them the large inheritance promised to their fathers, but in making them "the head, and not the tail," among their neighbours. David and Solomon were blessed in the great extent of their dominions, because the sphere of their usefulness and virtues was thereby enlarged. A curse is mingled with all the prosperity of sinners, because they know not how to use or to enjoy, but are disposed, by their corrupt tempers, to abuse every thing which they possess. But it is chiefly to be observed on this subject, th[illegible] the

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the extent of the dominion given to David and Solomon is to be considered as a shadow of the vast extent of dominion which was to be given to the true Son of David, whom all people, and nations, and languages, were to obey. Ahasuerus reigned from India to Ethiopia. David, in the person of his glorious Son, was to be the head of all the heathen, of all the nations from the rising of the sun to his going down.

VER. 2. & 3.—*That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes, and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him.*

This prince did not sit quietly on the throne of his kingdom in the beginning of his reign. By the wicked artifices of Artabanus, who had killed his father, he was persuaded to kill his own brother, Darius; and he was under the necessity of disputing the throne with another brother, whom he subdued, after detecting and punishing the wickedness of Artabanus, who wished to destroy him, and seize his throne. When he obtained the peaceable and secure possession of his throne and kingdom, he made a feast, that his princes and servants might rejoice with him.

"A feast is made for laughter:" And we do not blame the prince for calling his ministers and princes to celebrate a festival on an occasion happy for himself, and for his kingdom. Yet it would have been more honourable for him to have feasted less, and to have

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have testified his joy in thanksgivings to him by whom kings reign; and at the same time his grief, that the death of two brothers should have been found or supposed necessary to his own security, and to the peace of the empire. It can scarcely be supposed, that a prince so humane would ever entirely forgive himself for the death of his elder brother, when he found that there was not the least ground for those reports which induced him to consent to his destruction. "But the heart knoweth its own bitterness;" and often the policy of the great obliges them to conceal it under the appearance of joy.

VER. 4.—*When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.*

Many days, even an hundred and fourscore days! What intolerable feasting was this! Did not the king see that he was turning a pleasure into a burden too heavy to be borne? Who would not rather be condemned to work in the gallies for a whole year, than to perpetual feasting for the half of that time? Solomon said in his heart, "Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure." But (possibly before half a week elapsed) he said, "This also is vanity." "He said of laughter, It is madness, and of mirth, What doth it?" I believe all those princes, who had the honour to partake of Ahasuerus's feast, said so in their hearts, whatever language flattery might dictate to their lips.

Epicurus himself, who placed happiness in pleasure, enjoined temperance as a necessary means of pleasure. An author of our own nation justly ob-

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serves, that, when a great multitude of alluring dishes are set upon a table, a wise man may see palsies, apoplexies, and other grievous or mortal distempers, lurking amongst them. What disorders of the head, of the stomach, of the bowels, of the spirits, must have been the effect of an half-year's gormandizing and drunkenness, (for the Persians piqued themselves in their strength to drink wine, and mingle strong drink). Dearly did they pay for their entertainment.

Poor men, who are unable to provide for themselves any thing beyond the bare necessaries of life, are apt to envy those who have it in their power to fare sumptuously every day. Be persuaded, if you desire to be content with your condition, that happiness does not lie in the abundance of the things which a man possesseth, or in the rich entertainments which he is able to furnish out for himself or his friends. A person of quality observes *, in his works, "That the rich, if they do not in many things conform to the poor, particularly in temperance (sometimes even abstinence) and labour, will be the worse, and not the better, for their riches." This remark he makes as the result of his own large compass of observation; for he had been frequently in foreign countries, and had an extensive acquaintance with the great. Could not Jesus have furnished out as elegant an entertainment for those whom he fed by miracles, as Ahasuerus to his noble guests? And yet he fed them only with barley-loaves and fishes.

Could

* Sir William Temple.

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Could not God have brought wine, as easily as water, out of the rock for the refreshment of his people?

But, do you think that you would be really happy, if you were admitted to a banquet as rich, and of as long continuance, as that of Ahasuerus? Well, you shall have a feast far richer, and of far longer continuance, if you will believe the words of Solomon, and follow his directions: "He that is of a merry (or chearful) heart, hath a continual feast." "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars, she hath slain her oxen, she hath mingled her wine." Surely the feast which wisdom hath provided, the eternal, the personal Wisdom of God, is as much richer than this magnificent feast of Ahasuerus, as the heaven is higher than the earth. True, you will say; of this there can be no doubt. But where are the happy men that are invited to this feast?—You are invited. You shall partake of this precious entertainment, if you do not turn a deaf ear to the voice of the eternal Word: "Whoso is simple," says the Wisdom of God, "let him turn in hither: Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled *."

"When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty."

Poor man! little did he know wherein true riches, and glory, and royalty consisted. Happy were those kings that lived in Solomon's days, and heard his wisdom. If Ahasuerus had enjoyed this advantage, he would have learnt, that the land is to be pitied "whose princes eat in the morning," and that

* Prov. ix. 4. 5.

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the land is happy "whose princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness."

It is said of the father of Louis XV. King of France, that when his preceptor one day was speaking of this feast of Ahasuerus, and wondered how the Prince of Persia could find patience for such a long feast, he replied, that his wonder was, how he could defray the expence of it. He was afraid, that the provinces would be compelled to observe a fast for it. On another occasion, the same prince said, that he did not understand how a king should taste unmingled joy at a feast, unless he could invite all his subjects to partake; or unless he could be assured, at least, that none of them would go supperless to bed. Had this prince lived to reign, and retained such sentiments, he would have taught his people, by their happy experience, wherein the true glory of a king consists.

VER. 5.—*And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.*

This generous prince did not despise the poor of his people, but wished them to taste, for once, of his bounty. For small and great, in the royal city, he ordered a feast of seven days to be prepared. All that were wise among them would think seven days enough, or too much, to be spent in eating and drinking. Job thought one day at a time was rather too much, than too little, to be employed in feasting. In the days of his sons' feasting, he was afraid that in their mirth they might lose their reverence

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verence for God, and provoke him to anger against them; and therefore, while they were eating and drinking, he was praying for them, that they might be preserved from sin. Christ himself sometimes attended feasts in the days of his abode on earth; and therefore it cannot be unworthy of his followers, on proper occasions, to partake of a feast. But, whatever heathens might do, let the followers of Christ endeavour, on festival or on other occasions, to behave as Christ did.

As the king of Persia could not furnish a house for so many guests as were invited to his entertainment, pavilions were prepared for them in the palace-garden.

VER. 6.—*Where were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple, to silver rings, and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble.*

Learned men are not agreed about the exact meaning of the words which we render red, and blue, and black marble. Certain it is, that every thing on this occasion was suited to the state of the king, and fitted to give high ideas to the people of his riches and magnificence. The guests would reckon themselves happy to be admitted to the view of such splendour, and to take their seats on beds of gold and silver. Yet it is questionable, whether their pleasure would be very great at the end of the first, or of the second day. Every day we behold a more glorious scene in the canopy of the heavens, spread over our heads. The roses and the lilies, which

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adorn our gardens, are more beautiful than any of the productions of art which royal wealth can call forth. The earth is full of God's riches. The heavens shew forth his glory. Those who delight to have their eyes and their minds at once entertained, can be at no loss, though they are far from royal palaces, when the earth displays her beauty, and the stars their glory.

An ancient father, when he first set his foot in Rome, at that time the mistress and the wonder of the world, made this pious observation: "If an earthly kingdom is so glorious, how glorious must the New Jerusalem be!" If you account those men happy who were feasted in the royal gardens of Shushan, how blessed must those be, who are admitted to an eternal feast in Christ's Father's house! Gold, and silver, and pearls, are but poor emblems of its celestial splendour.

VER. 7.—*And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, the vessels being divers one from another, and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king.*

A certain king, asking a philosopher's advice how he should behave, was counselled by him, "always to remember that he was a king." Ahasuerus remembered that he was a king in his feasts. His wine was royal; his wine-vessels were of gold: every thing was according to the state of the king.

Blessed are they that shall drink new wine with Christ in his Father's kingdom. Every thing there is according to the state of the King of kings. His entertainments are worthy of his infinite grandeur and love. If all wise princes make it their rule to be

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be like themselves in every thing they do, it is not to be feared that God will ever deny himself.

VER. 8.—*And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.*

None was compelled to drink less or more than he pleased. The king's officers had positive orders to leave all his guests, poor or rich, to please themselves in the quantity or quality of the wine. This heathen prince behaved better than many Christian landlords, if we can call those men Christians, who tyrannize over the will and consciences of their guests, by forcing them to make themselves brutes, and to expose themselves to the damnation of hell. Are not men made brutes, when they are compelled, by importunate solicitations, to drink away their reason? Is not drunkenness one of those works of the flesh which bring the wrath of God on the children of disobedience? What Habakkuk says to the king of Babylon, in figurative language, is true in the literal sense: "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness."

Wise men will not be forced by any consideration to eat or drink more than the laws of temperance allow. They will not be teazed to destroy their own health, or their souls, by drinking the healths of the greatest men in the nation. The man who would compel them to wound their own souls, by sinning against God, they will view in no better a light than

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a barbarian, who puts a sword into their hands, and requires them to sheathe it in their own bowels.

It was the law of the Persians, that no man should be compelled to drink more than he pleased; and the king ordered this law to be observed in his feast. Did an absolute prince pay such regard to the laws of his country, and to the liberty of his subjects? and shall not Christians pay an equal regard to the laws of their religion? Are these laws less obligatory upon us at feasts, than on other occasions? Shall we requite the liberal Giver of all good things with insults on his authority, at the very time our table is covered by his bounty? No; in eating and drinking, and in every thing we do, we should remember the chief end of man.—In one thing we ought to go farther than the Persian prince. He would suffer no man to be compelled to drink: We should suffer no man to drink too much in our houses without compulsion; otherwise, we are accessory to the guilt and ruin of our neighbour. If we saw him, through heedlessness, in danger of falling over a precipice, and breaking his neck, would we not reckon it an act of charity to hold him back by force? If we saw him about to swallow some deadly poison, would we not seize upon the vessel which contained it, and cry aloud to him to do himself no harm? Perhaps we may be made the song of fools for refusing to drunkards the means of gratifying their intemperate appetites. But better to be the song of fools, than to offend God by neglecting to strive against sin. If we exercise liberality when it is our duty, we are in no danger of being reputed misers, for exercising our authority in our own houses, in matters wherein it ought to be exerted.

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VER. 9.— *Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women, in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus.*

The King did not grudge to his queen, and to the women of Shushan, the pleasures which he allowed to himself and to his male subjects, as far as they could be enjoyed without indecency. It would have been dangerous to morals, and inconsistent with received usages, for the queen and the ladies of Shushan to have associated with the other sex in their banquet; but they had a feast by themselves, in which they doubtless respected the laws of decorum and temperance.

It has been justly accounted an instance of grievous tyranny amongst the nations of the East, that the women are excluded from society with men. But every thing may be carried to excess. How many mischiefs does the unrestrained intercourse of the sexes occasion in many public diversions! Let not women be locked up in their chambers, as if they were criminals that must be held under close restraint; but let them not use their liberty for an occasion to the gratification of idleness, or a spirit of dissipation. Let them beware of that society that would corrupt their morals, or stain their character. Let them keep at a distance from those scenes of riot and festivity, where "foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient," are likely to be heard. They are not obedient to Christ, speaking by his apostles, if they are not "keepers at home," and if shamefacedness and sobriety are not better ornaments in their estimation than gold, and pearls, and costly array.

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DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

THE DISOBEDIENCE AND DIVORCE OF VASHTI.—CHAP. i. 10.—21.

VER. 10. & 11.—*On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown-royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to look on.*

"WINE is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Ahasuerus formerly behaved like a king. His wine, and the vessels in which it was drunk, were royal, according to the state of the king; but now his behaviour is like one of the vain fellows. He boasts of the extraordinary beauty of his wife. In defiance of the laws of decency, he will now have her brought into a drunken assembly of princes and peasants for a public shew. What is it that has

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thus degraded the great king? An honest peasant, that knows how to guide his affairs, and to govern his family with discretion, is more truly royal than Ahasuerus, exposing his shame before his people. Wine has transformed him from a king to a clown, or something below a clown. It is said, that the Spartans used to compel their slaves to intoxicate themselves, that they might shew them in their cups to their children, and thus produce in their minds a perpetual detestation of this worse than beastly vice. You have no occasion to bring drunken men into the presence of your children. Scripture gives you pictures of this vice, sufficient for your admonition and theirs. It is plain, from the instance before us, that a sober slave is more respectable than a drunken king.

"The crown of the wise is their riches; but the foolishness of fools is folly." The foolishness of rich and great fools is folly in its exaltation. The great king sends not a menial servant on the foolish business of bringing Vashti before him; but he sends seven of his high lords, in all the pomp of state, to conduct the queen; and she must come with the crown-royal upon her head, that not only Vashti, but royalty itself, might be disgraced in her person, when she was made a gazing-stock to the people with her royal ornaments.

"She was fair to look upon;"—and all the princes and the people must, for once, be gratified with a sight of her charms, that they might admire the king's happiness in the possession of such unrivalled beauty. Vain man! Did he not know, that the

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most glorious beauty of the human face is but a fading flower? Still less did he know, that this beauty, in a day's time, would be no longer his property, and that he would lose the possession of it by his own folly. Let those who have wives, however beautiful, be as though they had them not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.

VER. 12.—*But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.*

Learn from this part of the history, that "favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." A beautiful woman, destitute of virtuous principles, will, by the frowardness of her temper, and her rebellion against those whom she is bound to obey, discover a soul more deformed by pride and selfishness, than her body can be beautified by nature and art combined: but a woman that feareth the Lord will cultivate humility and self-denial. She will shew a ready disposition to give honour and obedience to whom honour and obedience are due; because she makes the will of the Lord the rule of her conduct.

Vashti had good reason to beg to be excused from appearing in a company where too many were merry with wine; and it is probable, that if she had sent her humble request to the king to spare her modesty, he might have recalled his orders. The king's word was not, like the laws, sealed with the king's seal. But Vashti gave a flat and unqualified refusal to the king's orders, announced by his honourable princes. She very probably thought she

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was supporting the decorum of her sex. But in the judgement of the king's wisest counsellors, she was exposing herself by her disobedience to just punishment; and she was really acting under the influence of pride, covered with the appearance of modesty. The king's command was foolish; but her disobedience was not wise. She was in no danger of being insulted by indecent words, or wanton glances, in the presence of her royal husband, whose frown was death to his subjects. She thought she was supporting the honour of her sex. But did she not see that she was affronting her husband, and her king, not only before his chamberlains, but before all his people? If he suffered his own family to trample upon his authority, his respectability amongst his other subjects must have been greatly lessened. The queen is the first subject in the kingdom; she ought, therefore, to go before all the other subjects, in shewing a becoming deference to the king's pleasure. In like manner, the wives of other men who have servants or children to govern, are utterly inexcuseable, if they do not, by such obedience as is required from wives, render the authority of their husbands respected in the family. This is a matter of such importance, that Paul will not allow those men to be chosen to rule in the church, who have not the power to govern their own houses: "For if a man," says he, "know not how to rule his own house, how shall he rule the church of God?"

I will not come, said Vashti; and all the persuasions of the great men sent to conduct her could not

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prevail upon her to give satisfaction to the king. She is too often imitated by women who have promised obedience to their husbands. They will alledge, that the meaning of their promise was, that they were to obey their husbands in all reasonable things. If by reasonable things they meant things in which they could give obedience with a good conscience, the limitation would be very proper. But a more frequent meaning which they have for the expression is, things which please their own humours. If these only are the matters in which they are disposed to yield obedience, the promise ought never to have been made; for whenever they conform themselves to their own humour, rather than to the known will of their husbands, they break a solemn promise; and thus, in the course of their lives, heap guilt upon guilt by many violations of the covenant of their God.

Let us not, however, overlook another observation suggested by the words before us, for the admonition of husbands. If they expect due obedience from their wives, let them be always reasonable in their commands; otherwise, half the guilt of the disobedience of their wives will remain with themselves. You see, that all the authority of the greatest king in the world could not make Vashti obedient to a foolish command. She will rather encounter the king's wrath; and "the wrath of a king is like messengers of death." She will rather risk the loss of her royal dignity, than come into a drunken company, at the order of Ahasuerus himself. Never impose a burden upon your wife, which

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which either female delicacy, or her particular temper, which you ought to know, will render too heavy for her to bear.

"Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him."—He was confounded and shocked at the unexpected disappointment. He hoped to shew to all his princes and people in Shushan how happy he was, and only shewed them his misery. He boasted of his wife's beauty; and she shewed how little respect she entertained for her husband and her king. When he expected the readiest obedience, he met with avowed rebellion. The person most indebted to him in all his dominions, was the first to set an example of opposition to his will.

Let husbands and wives remember, that there are no persons in the world from whom they have received more decisive testimonies of esteem and affection, than from one another; and therefore, that there are no persons from whom any instances of disrespect will be taken in worse part, unless they have obtained a great command of their temper. Husbands, provoke not to anger your wives, who have placed such confidence in you, that they have given you themselves. Wives, do not dishonour those husbands, who have chosen you from among all the rest of your sex, to commit to you the care of their comfort and their honour.

Beware of being too easily provoked by the behaviour of your husbands or wives. They have not treated you, you say, as they ought to have done. It may be so. But, perhaps, if you duly consider your

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own conduct, you may find that a part of the blame is your own. Was Vashti ever wont to treat Ahasuerus as she now did? No. He had never treated her before as he now treated her, and her resentment was kindled at the indecent proposal of being made a spectacle to all the people in Shushan. She could not be justified; but if Ahasuerus had considered how much of the blame lay upon himself, he might have moderated his anger, and turned a great part of it upon himself.

VER. 13.—*Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner towards all that knew law and judgement,*

It was a good advice given to Augustus Cæsar by the philosopher Athenadorus, when he found himself angry, never to speak or act under the influence of this passion, till at least he had repeated the Greek alphabet. By the time when he had done so, the philosopher thought his passion would be so far calmed, that his judgement would have liberty to operate. Ahasuerus was wise in taking the advice of his wise men, when his anger burned within him, before he would inflict any punishment on Vashti. He would have acted still more wisely, if he had delayed the matter till his passion was abated, and till he considered how much himself was to blame.

"In the multitude of counsellors is safety," says Solomon. Not only kings, but also private persons, often need wise counsels, especially when they are hurried away by their passions. But our loss is, that at such times we are more unfit than usual

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usual to receive council. Anger has been justly said to be a short madness; and yet we never think ourselves so wise as when this fit of madness is upon us.

Every man is not fit to be a counsellor. Ahasuerus took advice with his wise men, who knew the times, and who knew laws and judgement. "Times" sometimes signify the events that fall out in different periods, 1 Chron. xxix. *ult.* Those who in this sense know the times, are eminently fit to give good counsel, because, from what has been, and from what has been done, we may form a good conjecture of what is likely to be, or to be done *. But by men that know the times, it will perhaps be better to understand those who know what is fit to be done on any occasion. The princes of Issachar, in the days of David, are said to have been "men who knew the times, what Israel ought to do." No kind of knowledge is more important than the knowledge of the times, and of the duties proper to them. "Because man knoweth not his time," says Solomon, "he is like fishes taken in an evil net, and like birds caught in a snare, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Our Lord greatly laments the ignorance and inconsideration which made the people of Judea, in his days, careless about the signs and the duties of the times. "O that thou hadst known, thou at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace!"

"For so was the king's manner towards all that knew laws and judgement."—It was customary with the

* Eccles. i. 9. 10.

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the king to treat with high respect men of knowledge in the laws, and to consult them in the management of his affairs. Happy is the land governed by kings who trust not to their own understanding, who highly respect the laws, and make use of wise men learned in the laws, as their counsellors. Such was Solomon's disposition. Although he was the wisest of men, he had old counsellors, whom he consulted in all his affairs. And it was the folly of his son Rehoboam, by which he brought unspeakable mischief on himself, and upon his people, that he forsook the old counsellors who had stood before his father, and hearkened to those young counsellors, that paid much more regard to their own passions, and the king's, than to laws and judgement.

It was one great loss, however, to the Persians, and to all the heathen nations, that they were unacquainted with the laws of the Bible. There were, doubtless, many good laws among them; but there were bad laws likewise, such as that made by Darius, that no god or man (save the king only) should have any supplication presented to him, for the space of thirty days. It was the distinguishing advantage of the people of God, that their laws were the perfection of wisdom *. Let us make the laws of God the subject of our meditation day and night; so shall we attain more true wisdom, than the wisest heathen sages by a thousand years of the most diligent study. The laws of the Bible will direct our own feet in the paths of peace, and enable us

* Deut. iv. 6. 7.

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us to give the best counsels to our neighbours. "Have not I written to thee," says one of the inspired writers, "excellent things in counsels and knowledge, that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?"

VER. 14.—*And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom*),

The kings of Persia did not suffer themselves to be seen by their people promiscuously. They wished to be accounted superior to other mortals, and would not put themselves on a level with the rest of mankind, by exposing themselves to the eyes of the multitude. Thus they gratified their pride at the expence of their happiness and usefulness. They could not enjoy the comforts of society, nor procure the information which they needed of the state of their subjects and kingdom, whilst they secluded themselves from their people.

But there were seven princes of Persia and Media, who had a right by law to see the face of their sovereign. It was highly necessary that these men should exceed their fellow-subjects in wisdom, from whom the king was to receive the greatest part of his information, and by whose counsels he was to regulate his measures. But it cannot be reasonably supposed, that the happiest selection should always be made of men intrusted with such

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privileges. Those who wish to raise themselves above the rank of mortals, are likeliest of all others to fall below it. Few men in Persia were likely to know less of the real state of the kingdom, than a king, whose grandeur rendered him inaccessible to the greatest part of his subjects.

VER. 15.—*What shall we do unto the queen Vashti, according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus, by the chamberlains?*

Inflamed as the king was with rage, he wishes not to inflict any punishment upon the queen, but such as the laws warranted. Absolute princes, in their anger, commonly make their will their law; but this humane prince makes the law his will. The laws of kingdoms may be unjust; but it is far better to be governed by fixed laws, than by the capricious wills of men.

This pagan prince set us in some degree an example for the government of our passions. In the heat of his rage, he seeks advice, according to the laws. Are you angry at your wife, or at any body else? Before you give vent to your displeasure, inquire what you may do to the offender, not according to the dictates of your anger, but according to the laws. The laws of Persia might mislead Ahasuerus, although they were less likely to do so than his own passion. You have for your direction the law of Christ, which cannot mislead you. Do you ask, what ought to be done, according to this law, to a disobedient wife? Endeavour to reclaim her in the spirit of meekness. It does not permit you to banish

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banish her from your bed and house. It requires you still to love her as your own body; to temper all your admonitions with love, and to overcome evil with good.

VER. 16.—*And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus.*

There is one malignant circumstance in open sins, which is not generally considered to the extent it deserves; what is the influence which our conduct is likely to have upon other persons. Are there many who are likely to follow our example? then we must share in their guilt. We are their tempters to sin. You know under what infamy the name of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, lies, because he made Israel to sin. "Woe to the world," says our Lord, "because of offences. Offences must needs come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

Vashti's offence was likely to be hurtful to all the princes and people of all the great and large dominions of King Ahasuerus. So extensive might the influence of the queen's example be expected to prove. The great are under strong obligations to be circumspect. The greater they are, the greater will the influence of their good or bad behaviour be, and therefore, if they behave ill, their grandeur will be the occasion of their greater condemnation. Yet, let not persons of a low rank in life conclude, that they may take liberties to themselves which their superiors ought not to take. We have all our sphere

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sphere of influence. If we are possessed of Christian charity, we will endeavour to do good to all, and hurt to none *.

VER. 17.—*For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.*

It has been observed by heathen authors, that all the world regulates itself by the example of the king. It is to be lamented, that the maxim holds too much even among Christians, who have an infinitely better model for their behaviour, than the example of princes. If any man saith that he is a Christian, he saith that he abideth in Christ; and "if any man saith that he abideth in him, he ought himself to walk even as he walked." And yet, how common is it for those who call themselves Christians, to be conformed to this world, and to think that they can never degrade themselves, if they follow the example of the great! Read carefully the history of the bad kings of Israel and Judah, whose example their people followed. Did God count it any extenuation of their abominable idolatries, that their kings led the way in their wickedness? "Ephraim was oppressed and broken in judgement, because he willingly walked after the commandment," and after the example of his princes. The Jews, in a subsequent period, brought calamities upon themselves, greater than any nation had ever suffered, because they followed the example of their

* Rom. xiii. 10.

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their rulers in crucifying Jesus, and rejecting his gospel. We are ready to follow the bad examples of others, chiefly in those evil things to which we are most prompted by our own prevailing corruptions. Submission to those whom God hath placed over us, is a duty not pleasant to our corrupt natures. Our pride continually tempts us to raise ourselves to an equality with our superiors. For this reason we see so many undutiful sons, so many disobedient wives. And those who do not willingly subject themselves to their superiors, are glad to find examples to patronize them. If queen Vashti refused obedience to her husband, why might not the ladies of Persia and Media refuse subjection to their husbands also? And if both the queen and inferior ladies refused this subjection, why might not women of low rank follow an example so gratifying to their love of independence? Can any husband in the king's dominions expect greater submission from his wife than the king himself?

VER. 18.—*Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.*

"Likewise shall all the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes."—The king's nobles and princes trembled for their own dignity and authority. They durst not trust the good sense of their wives, but expected that Vashti's disobedience would by all of them be made a pretext for disobedience to themselves. Their fears were probably too just. What could be expected from women held

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held in the chains of ignorance and slavery, as the women of the East generally were, but that they would embrace every opportunity, and seize every pretext, for disentangling themselves from their fetters? Better things may be expected from women in our land, who are trained up in the knowledge of the true religion, and indulged with all reasonable liberty. They ought to know better things than to plead the example of the great, as if it were the rule of their duty. Our gracious queen has always set a good example of conjugal duty; but were it otherwise, what excuse would her example give to those who have been taught, that God requires them to be obedient to their husbands in all things, as the church is unto the Lord? If the great should take the road that leads to damnation, will the sight of their misery in the regions of punishment alleviate our torments? Or will it be any comfort to the damned, that they have for companions in misery those heads that were once encircled with crowns? Then it will lessen their torments, that they are to be associated with the devil and his angels, for these malignant spirits were once greater than the kings of any land.

"Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath." This would be the natural and necessary consequence of wives despising their husbands, that there would be fierce wrath and endless disputes between them. When authority is not acknowledged in a kingdom, there must be wars and seditions without hope of any termination; and when in a family honour is not given to the husband and father, the

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house is divided against itself, and peace and comfort are banished.

Wives, be obedient to your own husbands, if you value your peace and happiness above the gratification of a foolish unhallowed pride. Think not that you can ever find satisfaction in the indulgence of a perverse, rebellious, and imperious disposition. Your husbands know that you have no title to domineer over them, and must be provoked at that insolence which prompts you to usurp their place. Perhaps they may rather yield to your authority than live in perpetual war, but their tempers towards you will be soured. Their love will be turned into terror and aversion. You will no longer be considered by them as their dear and amiable companions, but as their tyrants. Is it not far better to engage their love, than to be feared by them? You cannot blame them for requiring obedience from you, because you have promised it. But when you require subjection to your government, it is impossible that they should not be aggrieved, when your conduct is so directly the reverse of your promises, and of the known will of God?

Contempt and wrath in families is an evil of such magnitude, that the princes of Persia thought it necessary to use the most vigorous and severe measures to prevent it.

VER. 19.—*If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Ahasue-*

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rus, and let the king give her royal state unto another that is better than she.

What an happy difference is there between the Christian law, and the laws of the Persians, if Memucan's advice was conformable to them! It is true, divorce for disobedience might serve the purposes which he had in view. It would greatly strengthen the authority of husbands. But that authority in husbands which is founded in terror, cannot contribute to the happiness of the conjugal life. What pleasure can it give to a man to find that his wife is careful to obey him, because she dares not behave otherwise? Or, why should laws be made to secure the authority of men, by the depression and misery of their wives and daughters? The Christian law, which does not allow of divorce, "saving for the cause of fornication," is acknowledged by the best writers, even of those who little regard the authority of Christ, to be exceedingly conducive to the peace of families. Wives, if they be not very inconsiderate, will see it necessary to submit to that authority from which they cannot be set free but by death: On the other hand, husbands, if they are not fools, will use their authority with mildness, when they know, that if they provoke their wives to give them disgust, by opposition to their will, they must bear all the miseries of a warfare which can be terminated only by the death of one of the parties.

The Persians, and most other nations, were careful to support the authority of men over women. But they paid little regard to the rights of women, who have as good a claim to kind usage, as men have

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to authority. And it will always be found, that where selfishness leads us to maintain our own claims, without any regard to the just claims of others with whom we are connected, the oppressed will find the means, one way or other, of retaliating upon their oppressors. Tyrants may find submission in those who are compelled to be their slaves; but the submission prompted by fear is attended with aversion or discontent. And what man can be happy in seeing misery around him, the fruit of his own lawless pride? Or, what pleasure can he take in the submission of a human creature, whom oppression may provoke to return his injuries by some methods which he cannot foresee nor prevent?

"Let Vashti be deposed from her royal dignity, and her royal state be given to one that is better than she."—In the eyes of Ahasuerus, Vashti was more beautiful than any woman that could have been put in her place; and her beauty was probably the cause of her elevation. But let men who have wives to chuse, know, whatever they think at present, that they will soon be convinced from experience, that there are qualities in women of far greater importance than a fine set of features, or a blooming complexion. In the married state, that woman who is best disposed to perform her duty will be found the most agreeable companion; and the beauty of her mind will soon render her more lovely to the eye than any outward form would do.

VER. 20.—*And when the king's decree, which he shall make, shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great), all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.*

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This decree was, indeed, likely to inspire all the wives with fear of their husbands. But was it not as likely to make all the husbands tyrants? If the king tyrannizes over the queen in this wide-extended empire, and announces his own example as their model, will not all husbands, great and small, learn to rule their wives with a rod of iron? The wives will, of consequence, be obedient slaves whilst the eyes of their husbands are upon them, but will not cordially promote their interests and comfort. Let your wives be sharers in your happiness, if you wish that they should contribute to it. Let them be treated with tenderness, if you expect sympathy from them in your distresses. Let not their faults be punished with rigour, until you can say, that your behaviour has never tempted them to commit such faults.

VER. 21.—*And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the words of Memucan.*

We do not wonder that the king was pleased with a proposal which gratified his pride and his anger. The princes too were pleased with a law which flattered their vanity, and sanctioned their domestic tyranny. Had they been taught to love their neighbours as themselves, no law would have appeared equitable to them which favoured the tyranny of the one-half of the human race over the other. It was indeed highly proper that the laws should secure the authority of men in their own houses; but this might have been as effectually done by a milder punishment. "And the king did according to the words of Memucan."

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VER. 21.—*For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.*

Great care is taken by this prince to prevent the bad effects which might result from the disobedience of Vashti. He not only divorces her, but publishes a decree through all his dominions, that every man should bear rule in his own house. He was afraid, that a spirit of independence among the female sex would soon spread disorder through the kingdom, if he did not take strong measures to counteract the bad example set by the queen. It is certainly the duty of all princes to do what they can to promote good order in their dominions, and to prevent or suppress every immorality. The safety and honour of a prince is in the virtue, as well as in the multitude of his people.

"Let every man bear rule in his own house."—This is the law of God, as well as of Ahasuerus. Let every wife willingly submit to the authority of her husband in all lawful things. Consider what miseries you may bring upon yourselves by refusing compliance with that order which God hath settled for the peace of families. What did Vashti think of her own conduct, when she lost a royal diadem by one act of disobedience? Did she not curse that pride, which a little before she had considered as an instance of female delicacy.

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You cannot lose a diadem by disobedience. Your husbands cannot divorce you; but they can embitter your lives, by the resentment of your conduct. For this reason you ought to behave well in the married state, because nothing but death can dissolve it; and therefore the whole, or the best part of your days, are likely to be poisoned by discord, if you do not contribute your part to maintain that mutual love which alone can render it happy.

You will not lose a crown of gold by your disobedience; but you may lose a crown more precious than gold. "The hoary head," either in man or woman, "is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." "A virtuous woman is herself a crown to her husband." Whether would you chuse to be a diadem of beauty to him, or to be rottenness in his bones?—God grant us grace to behave in such a way, in every situation of life, that some of the wise heathens may not rise up against us to condemn us in the day of Christ!

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DISCOURSE III.

EXTRAORDINARY METHOD USED TO SUPPLY THE PLACE OF VASHTI.

CHAP. ii. 1.——11.

VER. 1.—*After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.*

ABSOLUTE kings are envied by their inferiors, because they can do whatever they please, without contradiction. For this very reason they ought to be pitied. A man who may do what he pleases, will often do what will be very displeasing to himself in the recollection. Was Alexander the Great to be envied because his dominions were great, and his power absolute? He did not think so himself, when in his pride and drunkenness he had killed his faithful friend Clitus, and would next have killed himself, if he had not been forcibly restrained. When the fury of Ahasuerus against Vashti was cooled, did he rejoice in that absolute power by which he was enabled so easily to take severe vengeance on her

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her disobedience? Did he not envy persons of a private condition, whose actions are placed under such restraints that they cannot expose themselves to such terrible remorses, as those which have often embittered the days of kings?

"When the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti."—He thought upon the happy days he had enjoyed in her society; upon the proofs she had formerly given him of her affection and obedience; upon the folly of his own conduct, which had tempted her, for once, to dispute his orders; upon the cruel punishment inflicted on her; upon the impracticability of reversing the sentence passed against her; upon a thousand circumstances which added to the disgust of his mind. Remorse now punished him almost as severely as his imperious device had punished the unhappy queen.

VER. 2.—4.—*Then said the king's servants, that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king. And let the king appoint officers, in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege, the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women, and let their things for purification be given them; and let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king, and he did so.*

"He that reproveth a man, shall afterwards find more favour than he that flattereth with his lips." If the king's seven counsellors had advised him to moderate his anger against Vashti, to require and accept from her such acknowledgements of her fault

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as might have prevented the bad effects of her example, and to suffer her to retain her royal station, he would have thanked them when his anger was appeased. They seem to have been apprehensive, when he was restored to himself, that his anger would be turned upon them. What method must be taken for their security? It would be inconsistent with the fundamental laws of Persia and Media, to restore the degraded queen to her rank. Besides, her vengeance, in case of her restoration, might prove fatal to the authors of her disgrace. On the other hand, the queen's beauty was so highly admired by the king, that he is not likely to forgive the advisers of the divorce, unless he can find a wife equal in beauty. For this reason, his servants (among whom his great counsellors were the chief) advised him, by means of proper officers, to collect all the fairest virgins in the various provinces of his dominions; to put them under the care of Hege, the chamberlain; to prepare them, by proper purifications, for converse with the king, that he might chuse out of them, as his queen, the fairest woman in all his dominions, or (which was the same thing perhaps) in all the world.

This advice appears to us very strange, and very barbarous. Must the king engross all the beauty of his dominions, by taking to himself, as his queen or concubines, all the beautiful young women that could be found in all his provinces? Are women born for nothing else, but to be the property of any man that can purchase them by his money, or tyrannize over them by his power? Are a thou-

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of the most beautiful women to become the property and the prisoners of one man? If the king is so fond of female beauty, he should remember that other men feel the same desires, and claim the same right to gratification with himself.

The king's behaviour, however, was such as might have been expected in a country where men thought they had a right to multiply wives to themselves, if they had the means of procuring and supporting them. Where no regard is paid to equity and purity of conduct amongst a people, their prince will naturally think, that his power and affluence entitle him to superiority in the inordinate gratification of his sensual appetites. Where reason and the law of God do not set limits to the desires of men, they will be carried beyond all bounds.

How much are we indebted to the Bible for present as well as expected happiness! We learn from it, that God has created one man for one woman. We could not value its discoveries too highly, were it only for the accounts that it gives us of creation, and of the great law of marriage resulting from it. The knowledge of the divine authority of this law, that a man ought to have only one wife, is equally essential to the happiness of both sexes of our race. Why, then, do not both men and women resent every attempt made by the enemies of religion to weaken the authority of a book, which so effectually secures the natural rights of the male as well as of the female part of human kind?

"The thing pleased the king, and he did so."—He did so, because it pleased him; but he ought

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to have considered, not only his own wishes, but the laws of justice and equity. He was not blessed with the knowledge of divine revelation; but did not his own heart tell him, that we ought to do nothing to please ourselves that is oppressive to those who are made of the same materials, and have the same feelings with ourselves? If Ahasuerus had not been a king, but a subject, would he have thought it reasonable that kings should inclose all the beautiful women of the country in their seraglios? Would he have thought it reasonable, in that case, that his own sisters, or daughters, should have been immured for life within the walls of a palace, to minister occasionally to the pleasures of a prince, if he should think of sending for them, or to live and die forgotten by their capricious lord?

We enjoy the inestimable advantage of knowing our Lord's will by divine revelation. We are very unworthy of that benefit, if we do what comes into our own minds, or what is suggested to us, merely because it pleaseth us. The first question with us ought to be, How we are to walk so as to please God? Nothing is a surer sign of reigning depravity, than to prefer the pleasing of our flesh to the pleasing of him who made us, of him by whom we must be judged at the great day. If we make it our grand business to fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind, we walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air.

VER. 5. & 6.—*Now, in Shushan the palace, there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of*

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of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem, with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

The greatest objection against the opinion that Ahasuerus was the same prince who is called Artaxerxes in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is taken from this passage, in which Mordecai is said to have been carried captive with Jeconiah, king of Judah. If he was then carried captive, he must now have been more than an hundred and fifty years old, although he was afterwards capable of exercising the office of prime minister to the king of Persia.

It is indeed improbable, though not impossible, that Mordecai might live, and be fit for business, at this great age. We have often heard of a Countess of Desmond, who lived and enjoyed health for 150 years. She lived during the reigns of Edward V. and his successors, to the reign of James I. In the reign of Charles I. John Par lived to the age of 152; and, in the following reign, Charles Jenkin to the age of 169. Scripture itself informs us of a man who was a prime minister in the end of his life, although he died at the age of 130 years*.

But, perhaps, it is more to the purpose to observe, that in the time of Artaxerxes Longimanus, Ezra often speaks of the people of the Jews, as if they had been captives in Babylon, although it is certain, that very few of them had ever seen that land of captivity. "Thus were assembled unto me," says that

* 2 Kings, xii.

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that inspired historian, "every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of them that had been carried away captive." These words refer to an event that happened in the very year when Esther became queen of Persia, if Ahasuerus was the same with Artaxerxes, and yet the people are said to have been carried away captive. They certainly were not carried away captive in their own persons, but in the persons of their ancestors. Why may we not suppose, that the writer of the book of Esther uses the same mode of expression in speaking of Mordecai?

A still easier solution has been given of this difficulty, by referring what is said in the beginning of the 6th verse, not to Mordecai, but to Kish, his progenitor.

But why was Mordecai in Shushan the palace, when the Lord had turned again the captivity of his people? Why did he not rather reside in the Holy Land, that he might be near the house of the Lord? Was he not of a very different spirit from David, whose great desire was to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life? We cannot, without rashness, condemn the good man for this part of his conduct. Even Daniel continued in Babylon after the proclamation of liberty to the Lord's captives. Both these men doubtless loved the habitation of the Lord's house; but they might have reasons which entirely justified their continuance in a foreign land. It was love to the habitation of the Lord that fixed Daniel at a distance from it, where he could perform services to Jerusalem, which he could

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could not have performed at Jerusalem itself. This, too, was Nehemiah's motive for residing at the king's court; and the same, in all probability, was the motive which induced Mordecai to dwell in Shushan.

VER. 7.—*And he brought up Hadassah, (that is, Esther), his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful, whom Mordecai (when her father and mother were dead) took for his own daughter.*

Hadassah, otherwise called Esther, was daughter to an uncle of Mordecai. It is uncertain whether she was the immediate daughter, or more remote descendant of Mordecai's uncle, for it is well known that the word *daughter* may, with equal propriety, be taken in either of these senses. She must, at least, have been much younger than Mordecai, who took her not as a companion, or a wife, but as a daughter, her father and mother being dead. He performed a kind and laudable action to this poor orphan; and was well rewarded for it by the gratitude of Esther, and by the liberality of divine providence.

It is lamentable for poor infants, especially of the weaker sex, to be bereaved of both their parents. But, blessed be the Father of the fatherless, they often find friends no less kind, and no less useful, than fathers or mothers. Let young persons deprived of their parents learn to say, "Though my father and mother both should leave me, the Lord will take me up." Esther, through the favour of providence, was well educated by a cousin, and was advanced to the highest dignity which could be conferred

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red on her sex, although she neither expected, nor perhaps desired it.

VER. 8.—*So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.*

Poor Esther, who had been so kindly cherished by Mordecai, was now led away from his house to be the slave, or the beloved wife of the great king, as his caprice should determine. Her consent was not asked; the consent of Mordecai, her adopted father, was not asked. They were both slaves to a despotic master. Blame not Esther, therefore, but pity her, when you hear, that, like so many other maidens, she was led away to the house of the king's women. Think not that she sets you an example of entering into marriage-connections with a partner of a false religion. She was not an actor, but a sufferer. Had she been left to her choice, it is probable she would have chosen the poorest Jew that was faithful to his religion, for her husband, in preference to the great king.

Some young women may think it hard to be under the authority of parents, and under the necessity of paying great deference to their counsels in the choice of a husband. Be thankful that you are under the direction of such affectionate friends, rather than under the command of an unfeeling lord. How glad would Esther have been to be left under the direction of her second father! The time has b[illegible]

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when, even in England, many young women were under the controul of haughty lords, who disposed of them in marriage at their pleasure.

VER. 9.—*And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him, and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her out of the king's house, and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.*

Esther's singular beauty, her modesty, her unaffected simplicity of dress and behaviour, appear to have engaged the affection of all that conversed with her. It was God that gave her these lovely endowments, which captivated all hearts. It was God that gave her favour in the eyes of beholders. She was no doubt deeply affected with the thought of separation from her beloved father, to be put under the government of strangers, and to enter into involuntary competition with so many beauties for the possession of the king's heart. She was certainly of the temper of the Shunamite who said to Elisha, "I dwell amongst mine own people;" but God, for gracious ends, permitted her not to enjoy her wishes. He consoles her, however, by the favour that he gave her in the eyes of the man to whose care she is committed. His respect and attention made the change of her condition less painful to her. Every thing was done for her that she could wish, to make her confinement easy. She had her things for purification given her. She had seven maids given her to wait upon her. She had the best apartments in the house of the virgins. All the

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the presents allowed by the king to his women were readily given her by Hegai with a good grace, and without any means used on her part to obtain them. This favour of the chamberlain might be considered by her as a pledge of the care that divine providence took of her comfort, and a presage of the favour that she might expect from the king himself, when the year was expired.

VER. 10.—*Esther had not shewed her people, nor her kindred; for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.*

We must never be ashamed of our people, or our kindred, especially when we have the honour to be related to the godly. Yet it may be, on many occasions, a part of prudence to say little or nothing of our connections. We must never be ashamed of our religion, if we desire that Christ may not be ashamed of us at the day of his appearance. Yet there is a time to be silent, as well as to speak, of that blessed name by which we are called. Mordecai knew that many hated the Jews and their religion, and that Esther, by publishing her connection with them, might procure malevolence to herself, without serving the cause of her people. "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgement."

Esther's obedience to Mordecai is no less worthy of attention and imitation, than Mordecai's prudence. Let young women learn from her to pay a due deference to the instruction of their parents, not only when under their eyes, but when they are removed from them. What miseries to young people might be prevented, what happiness might they en-

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joy, would they but cease from their own wisdom and humour, and obey those whom God commands them to obey!

VER. 11.—*And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.*

Mordecai, though the adoptive father of Esther, was not permitted to visit her. How much better are our laws calculated than those of the eastern nations, for the comfort of human life! Let us be thankful for our advantages of free intercourse with our friends, and not use our liberty for a cloak of licentiousness.

Mordecai did not forget his favourite cousin when she was taken from him. He took care to be informed daily of her health and welfare. Our friends ought not to be out of our mind, when they are removed from our sight. We may be useful to them by our prayers, and by other means, when we cannot see them. When Paul was distant from the Christians whom he loved, he was always desirous to know their circumstances, and to inform them of his own *.

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* Eph. vi. 22.

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DISCOURSE IV.

ESTHER MADE QUEEN OF PERSIA.—BY HER MEANS MORDECAI DISCOVERS TO THE KING A CONSPIRACY FORMED AGAINST HIS LIFE.—CHAP. ii. 12.—23.

VER. 12.—*Now, when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purification accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women),*

THE pleasures of sensuality were carried to the highest excess by those men who ruled over the Persian empire. The women designed for their embraces were obliged to undergo a wearisome purification, to render them the more agreeable to their pampered lords. Their eyes and their nostrils must be at once regaled by the presence of their beauteous

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nions. Voluptuousness must be turned into an art, and a toil, to gratify their senses. Had they never learned, that they who devote themselves to pleasure destroy it? Moderation in the pleasures of sense is necessary for the enjoyment of them; and those who can relish pleasure only in excess, prepare for themselves satiety, disappointment, or chagrin. If we will not regulate our enjoyments by the laws of God, made known to us by reason, religion, and experience, our pleasures will end in the worst of pains.

VER. 13. 14.—*Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her, to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines; she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.*

Such was the fate of those wretched beauties that were collected for the king's pleasure. They were gratified with rich presents. They might have what jewels, or what ornaments they desired, when they were first admitted to the king's presence. But when they became his concubines, or secondary wives, and were committed to the custody of Shaashgaz, to be held in captivity for life, they were not so much as admitted into the king's presence, unless he was pleased to call them by name. How much better was it to be the wife of a peasant, than to be a concubine to the great king? And the peasant who loves his wife, and is beloved by her, enjoys pleasures which princes who love none but themselves cannot taste.

VER. 15.—*Now when the turn of Esther, the daugh-*

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ter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai, (who had taken her for his daughter), was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed: and Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

Esther had no wish to set off her beauty by such ornaments. She asked nothing from Hegai, although she had the complaisance to put on the ornaments which he gave her. Vanity very often disappoints itself: and no women are so beautiful in the eyes of beholders, as those that discover the least desire of admiration. Esther obtained favour with her unaffected ornaments in the eyes of Hegai, in the eyes of all beholders, in the eyes of the king himself.

VER. 16.—*So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus, into his house royal, in the tenth month, (which is the month Tebeth), in the seventh year of his reign.*

For the space of four years Vashti's place was unoccupied. It is not surprising, that the king, who divided his love (if it may be called love) amongst so many women, should so long want a partner to his crown. He knew not the true pleasure of the conjugal life. He discerned, however, other qualities besides beauty in Esther. He found her mind still more charming than her face.

VER. 17.—*And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight, more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.*

What a surprising revolution took place in the fortune of this orphan daughter of Abihail! Among so many hundreds of competitors, she could have but a

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poor prospect of rising above the rank of a concubine. But the king was charmed with her beauteous countenance, the indication of a virtuous mind, and set the crown-royal upon her head.

We are not, however, to ascribe this change in her circumstances, so much to the king's admiration either of her person or mind, as to the over-ruling providence of God, in whose hand are the hearts of kings, to be more easily turned by him whithersoever he wills, than the rills of water in a field can be turned by the husbandman to water his ground. The same gracious providence which exalted Joseph to be lord over Egypt, that he might be "the shepherd and stone of Israel," raised Esther to the dignity of a great queen, that she might be the protector of the race of Jacob in a time of extreme danger.

Whilst we regret the unmerited fate of Vashti, who was degraded for a pardonable offence, whilst we deplore the effeminacy of a great king, who was a slave to the love of pleasure, and the unhappy fate of those ladies who were sacrificed to his vanity or lust, let us adore that all over-ruling providence, which managed the vices and weaknesses of the king of Persia in a subserviency to the interests of his despised people, and to the glory of that wisdom by which he brings safety and felicity to his chosen, out of those events which appeared to have no relation to them. "Our help is in the name of the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

VER. 18.—*Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made*

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made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

The king appears to have taken much delight in feasts. It was well that he did not take delight in something worse. A feast on occasion of his marriage with the accomplished queen whom he espoused, cannot expose him to blame. We find marriage-feasts common among patriarchs and judges in Israel. Jesus himself, and his disciples, attended a marriage-feast, where he performed the beginning of his public miracles. "A feast is made for laughter;" and we may partake of it without sin, if we are careful to glorify God in eating and drinking, and in whatever we do.

The king, at the same time, gave a release to the provinces from their usual imposts, and bestowed gifts, according to the state of the king. His heart overflowed with joy at the acquisition of a queen so beautiful, and possessed of so many virtues. He wished his subjects to rejoice with him; and endeavoured, by his liberality on Esther's account, to procure for her the good-will and the blessing of his people. That man must be selfish to an uncommon degree, who can confine his joys to himself. The man of a truly generous spirit would have all around him, if possible, as happy as himself.

VER. 19.—*And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.*

The virgins that had been collected for the king, were first put under the care of Hegai. They were now collected together, as secondary wives, under the care of Shaashgaz, to be left in perpetual solitude,

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or to be sent for by the king to share his bed, as his humour should direct him. Such was their unhappy condition; and such the condition of Esther would have been, if God had not given her favour in the sight of her lord. Esther was doubtless penetrated with gratitude to God, when she considered the condition of her rivals, who were buried alive by a perpetual seclusion from the pleasures of society. And have not the poorest of European women reason to thank the great Disposer of human affairs, when they consider the slavery imposed upon women in the East? How precious are those laws of Christ, "Let every woman have her own husband." "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church." What happiness has been diffused by them over all those places of the earth, where they have been received as the commandments of the Lord!

Mordecai sat in the king's gate at the time when Esther was made queen, and the other ladies of the king were collected into the house of the concubines. What was Mordecai's office at the king's gate, we cannot precisely say. It was probably not so mean as that of a common porter, nor so high as Mordecai might have expected, if it had been known that he was the queen's adoptive father. But his eyes were not lofty, nor his heart haughty, nor did he seek a great place for himself in the palace. He had even taken measures to prevent the knowledge of his relation to the queen.

VER. 20.—*Esther had not yet shewed her kindred, nor her people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther did*

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did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

Esther was far from being ashamed of her people or of her kindred. She rejoiced more that she was the daughter of Abihail, than in her royal dignity. She was far from being unwilling, when occasion should require it, to solicit needful favours for her people and her kindred, whose welfare, we will afterwards find, was preferred by her to her life. But she did not chuse to be needlessly troublesome to the king with her petitions, and, at the same time, she was under restraints by the commandment of Mordecai, who had charged her to say nothing about her kindred or her people.

But did not Esther forget her rank, when she would obey Mordecai as she had done when she was a child? Shall the wife of the great king be held under pupillage upon her throne? Esther is more truly great in the obedience she still yielded to Mordecai, than in the honours conferred on her by Ahasuerus. Her gratitude, her humility, her filial obedience, ennoble her more than a hundred diadems of the brightest gold could have done.

The woman, as well as the man, that enters into the state of marriage, must leave father and mother. But think not that your change of life sets you free from the obligations of honouring your parents, or even of obeying them, as far as obedience to them is compatible with your new duties. You must honour your father as long as he lives; and you must not despise your mother when she is old, and stands in more need than ever of the comforts which she will receive from your attentions.

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You that have been left orphans, and have found parents in other friends, are bound, whether in the single or married state, to testify your respect and gratitude to them, as if you were their children. In some respects you are more indebted to them than children to their parents. They took you under their protection when you were in a destitute condition, and when they were not constrained by such powerful obligations as natural parents.

Let no change in your condition be a pretext for forgetting the duties you owe either to parents, or to friends who have treated you with the tenderness of parents. Esther, when she was a queen, paid the same deference to Mordecai, as when she was a dependant upon his bounty. Our Lord Jesus Christ was more highly raised above his mother from the very beginning of his mortal life, for he was the Son of God; and yet he was subject to his parents whilst he lived with them; and when he was upon the cross, provided another son for his mother to comfort her, when he should leave the world.

VER. 21.—*In those days, (while Mordecai sat in the king's gate), two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus.*

It was not the design of the writer of this book to give us the history of king Ahasuerus, or of his wicked servants, but to give us the history of a wonderful salvation wrought for God's scattered people. But events of many different kinds are combined, and cooperate under divine direction for accomplishing his gracious purposes to his people. Who would have thought that the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh,

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fatal only to themselves, had any relation to the salvation of Israel? But if their conspiracy had not been formed, it would not have been detected; and by detecting it, Mordecai gained that favour with the king which afterwards proved fatal to the great enemy of Mordecai and of Israel.

"Bigthan and Teresh were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus."—You may envy kings, and think they are more fortunate than other people, because they were born to be great. But greatness ensures neither safety nor happiness. If kings were immortal, when other men must descend to the dust, or if their royalty would protract their lives to the age of Methuselah, there would be some plausible pretence for looking up to them with an envious eye. But they die like men, although they are honoured with the title of gods. They are even exposed to dangers from which men of lower ranks are exempted. The father of Artaxerxes was treacherously destroyed by one of his own servants. One of his descendants and successors was killed by a favourite eunuch, and had his flesh given to the rats. This prince himself, one of the best that swayed the Persian sceptre, had his life sought by the treachery of those who did eat of his bread, and who had doubtless given him many assurances of their attachment to his person and government. The life of European princes, in our time, seems to be less precarious than that of many ancient princes, because their governments are so constituted as to obviate the hopes of ambition in their subjects. Yet, in our own days, we have seen two sovereigns cut off by the hand of violence, and the life of our own sovereign [illegible]

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may God long preserve) exposed to danger from the hands of madmen.

Bigthan and Teresh were wroth with king Ahasuerus; and therefore they sought to lay hands on him. Kings are often ill informed of the real disposition of their subjects towards them. Flatterers assure them, that whatever they do pleases all the people; and there are few, or none, that chuse to wound their ears with painful truth. But none are more exposed to ill-nature and dislike. It was the saying of Louis XIV. of France, that when he bestowed any office, he made ninety-nine men discontented, and one unthankful, (meaning the person to whom he gave the office). What were the grounds of the wrath of Bigthan and Teresh, we cannot tell. But in the management of the affairs of a large empire, there must be many things daily done which will awaken the wrath of selfish and ambitious men. What man was ever so fortunate as to dispense a thousand favours, without giving disgust to some of those who did not share in them? and perhaps not less to those who have shared in them; for it is difficult to make a proud man believe, that he is respected according to his merits.

Mortify all your corrupt passions, and never let them be suffered to regulate your conduct. How often has the passion of anger involved men in blood and treason! Most justly does our Lord explain the sixth commandment to include the prohibition of anger.

Beware of speaking a word, or entertaining a thought, inconsistent with that high respect which is due to princes; "for a bird of the air shall carry the voice,

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and that which hath wings will tell the matter." Bigthan and Teresh afford but one of many thousands of instances in which the secret thoughts and speeches of traitors have been unexpectedly brought to light, by the providence of him who "giveth salvation unto kings."

VER. 22.—*And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen, and Esther certified the king thereof, in Mordecai's name.*

We are not told how the thing came to the knowledge of Mordecai. But we know that, whatever was the means, God was the author of the discovery. It was by his good providence that the life of the king was preserved, that he might be useful to the Israel of God. It was by his good providence that Mordecai the Jew was the discoverer of the treason, that the king's favour might be conciliated to Mordecai, and to Esther and to their people. May we not add, that the wicked designs of these traitors, Bigthan and Teresh, were permitted by the providence of God, that the detection of them might contribute to the advancement of his gracious purposes? He permits no more wickedness to take place, than he knows how to over-rule for good. "The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of his wrath shall he restrain."

As soon as Mordecai came to the knowledge of the plot formed against the king, he took the best measures to prevent the execution, by revealing it to the queen, and by her to the king. If we forbear to deliver those that are drawn unto death, and those who are ready to be slain, we are partners in the guilt of their blood. We are bound especially to contribute

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tribute our best endeavours, as we have opportunity, to preserve the lives of princes, those ministers of God for good, under whose protection we enjoy life and its comforts. Mordecai was under special obligations, as a servant of his king, who sat at his gate, to be careful of his life. But all the subjects of a king are under powerful obligations to seek and to promote, by all proper means, his life and welfare. Abishai procured to himself great honour, and yet did no more than his duty, when he put his life into his hand, and encountered a mighty giant, to save the life of David.

Esther certified the matter to the king in Mordecai's name. Here she appears to have acted without commandment from him. It was sufficient for Mordecai to do his duty, and to save the king's life, without seeking either praise or reward for a service which he could not neglect without baseness and treachery. But Esther, on the other side, wished not for those rewards and honours from the king which more justly pertained to another. She had now an opportunity of recommending to the king's favour her affectionate friend and father, and she did not suffer it to pass neglected. Never let us assume to ourselves the praises that belong more justly to another; but let us be ever ready to procure for our friends and brethren those honours and rewards to which they are entitled.

VER. 23.—*And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.*

The king Ahasuerus would not, by his absolute authority, deliver up to punishment even men who had

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had conspired against his life, till he had good proofs of their guilt. Happy would it have been for him and for his subjects, if he had never departed from this principle, that proof should go before punishment. Grievous and dangerous as the crime of idolatry among God's people was, he would not have it punished till proper inquisition was made about the fact *. What safety can any man enjoy, if accusation is to hold the place of evidence?

Both the traitors were hanged. Their punishment was just and necessary, and more moderate than punishments often were among the Persians. Ahasuerus would not suffer his enemies to escape vengeance, although he was a humane prince. And think not, you who are enemies and traitors to the Prince of the kings of the earth, that you shall escape the vengeance merited by your wickedness? "Those mine enemies," he will say, "who would not have me to reign over them, bring forth and slay before my face." Earthly princes are terrible in their wrath against the enemies of their crown or life; but all that they can do is only to kill the body. The King of heaven has power to kill both soul and body, and to cast both into hell-fire.

"And it was written in the books of the chronicles before the king."—It was a wise institution in Persia, that secretaries should commit to registers every remarkable action of the king, and every event of his reign. It was a great encouragement to well-doing, and a powerful discouragement from evil-doing, to know that what was done would not be forgotten. Suppose you knew that a register was kept by some

* Deut. xiii.

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invisible scribe of all that you think, or speak, or act, what manner of persons would you endeavour to be in the exercise of every virtue? Know, then, that none of your actions ever can be forgotten, that even your most secret thoughts are written in durable registers. The Lord hearkens and hears all that is spoken by us. He observes all that we think or do, and a book of remembrance is written before him, which will one day be opened, to the praise of them that do well, and to the confusion of the wicked.

Mordecai was not presently rewarded by the king for the eminent service which he had done him. No matter; it was marked down in the king's register. He may one day find, that it was a good thing patiently to wait the king's time. At present he wanted nothing. The time may come when the king's favour may be more valued by him than life itself. If he had never been rewarded by the king, the testimony of his conscience, and the assurance of divine approbation, were more to him than all that the king could bestow.

It was possible that the king of Persia might forget the services done to him, though they were recorded in his books. But let none of those who perform any services, in the fear of God, to God or to men, to kings or to beggars, be afraid of losing their reward. God will not be unrighteous to forget any works or labours of love done for the name of his dear Son. A cup of cold water given to a disciple shall in no wise lose its reward; and whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

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DISCOURSE V.

THE ELEVATION OF HAMAN.—HIS PRIDE, AND RESOLUTION TO REVENGE FANCIED INDIGNITIES, RECEIVED FROM MORDECAI, UPON THE WHOLE NATION OF THE JEWS.—CHAP. iii.

VER. 1.—*After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.*

A THOUSAND years before this time, the family of Agag was renowned in the world. "His king," said Balaam concerning Israel, "shall be higher than Agag." The generous spirit of Ahasuerus might probably feel sentiments of compassion for the poor representative of a family once so glorious, and endeavour by his favour to make him some compensation for the fallen grandeur of his house and people; but why did God suffer a man to be raised high above the princes of Persia, who was to make such a bad use of his grandeur, as we will soon find Haman did? "Promotion cometh not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge. He putteth down one, and setteth up another." Why, then, is the basest and proudest of men set up so high,

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that all the princes of Persia must bow to him? It is needless to answer the question at present. We will find it sufficiently answered in the course of this history; which will teach us, that "when the wicked spring up as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever; because thou, Lord, art most high for evermore *."

VER. 2.—*And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate, bowed and reverenced Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him: but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.*

Many of the king's ministers had their stations in the king's gate, where, it is probable, convenient apartments were provided for them; and all of them honoured him whom the king delighted to honour. "Where the word of a king is, there is power." All will bow to the man on whom the king is pleased to smile. If the favourites of earthly kings are so highly respected, ought we not to honour those who are the favourites of Heaven? The mind of Christ is not in us, if we do not honour them that fear the Lord.

Why did the king command his servants to pay such distinguished honours to Haman? Did he not believe that his own known affection to Haman, and the high honours conferred upon him, were abundantly sufficient to ensure to him all that honour to which the highest subject could be entitled? From this command it appears probable that the king desired greater honour to be given to Haman, than was usually given even to kings' favourites; and this was probably

* Psal. xcii. 7. 8.

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probably the reason why Mordecai refused to perform that homage to Haman, which he expected from the royal command in his favour. Many authors attest, that honours of a religious kind used to be given to the kings of Persia, by those who came into their presence; and some share of the like honour was, it is likely, required by the king for his favourite and friend.

This, at least, we may safely say, that Mordecai did not decline the required homage to Haman, either from motives of envy, or from narrow scruples of conscience, in a matter where conscience was not concerned. He well knew that Abraham made no scruple of bowing himself to the ground before strangers who came to his tent; that Joseph accepted of the homage of the Egyptians, which (if our translation of Gen. xli. 43. is just) amounted to no less than bowing the knee before him; and that when the people of Israel worshipped the Lord and king David, they did nothing inconsistent with their religion. It was only civil homage that they performed to their fellow-men. But, in all appearance, something more was understood to be signified by that homage which was required for Haman; and Mordecai would not in the least instance violate his duty, to please the greatest of men.

VER. 3.—*Then the king's servants which were in the king's gate said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?*

The king's servants thought his commands entitled to implicit obedience. Whatever he said was a law to them. He was an image of God upon earth; and obedience of an unreserved kind seemed to them a part of their duty. Christians have not so learned

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to regulate their practice. There is one King whose commands must ever be a law to us: For "why call we Christ, Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he says *?" The commands of earthly princes are to be done likewise, out of conscience towards God, when they do not oppose his commandments. But when any thing is enjoined us contrary to the honour of God, and to the duty which we owe to him, we must obey God, and not man; for whether it be right in the sight of God to obey God or man, it is not difficult to decide.

"Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?"—Mordecai professed and practised on former occasions strict loyalty. He had recently saved the king's life, and might hope for a good reward, if he continued to satisfy the king by his obedience. Why, then, does he now act in express opposition to his declared will? Did he not know that kings must be obeyed, and will not suffer disobedience to their orders to pass unpunished?

Confessors of the truth, who exposed themselves to reproach and punishment for their fidelity to God, have been the wonder of the world in every age; especially when their opposition to the public laws seemed to turn upon small matters. The heathens who saw the Christians expose themselves to a cruel death, because they would not throw a few grains of incense into the fire, nor worship the genius of Cæsar, believed that they had lost their reason. The like notions were formed concerning Protestant and Presbyterian martyrs by their enemies. But surely true wisdom will direct us to chuse the greatest sufferings, rather

* Luke, vi. 46.

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rather than the least sin. God can easily recompense our worst sufferings in his cause; but who can compensate the damage of the least sin? Remember the words of Jesus, "Whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments, or shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven *."

VER. 4.—*Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai his matters would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.*

"They spake daily unto him."—This they understood to be the office of friends; for Mordecai, they thought, was risking his life for a trifling scruple about his religion. They did not think it the part of a man of sense to throw away his life for the punctilios of religion; and used all their eloquence to persuade him to change his conduct. But their friendship to him was of the same kind with Eve's friendship to Adam, when she persuaded him to eat the forbidden fruit; or with Delilah's friendship to Samson, when she insisted upon a proof of his love that was to be fatal to his own life. Those are our true friends who warn us against declining the cross of Christ by sinful compliances. Those are our worst enemies, who persuade us to prefer our life and comfort to our duty. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us this lesson when he said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" Peter's offence was, that he would not have his Lord to suffer. This he accounted an expression of his friendship, but Christ esteemed it an expression of enmity worthy of Satan, the great enemy of God and men.

When they spake to him day by day, Mordecai was

* Matth. v. 19.

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still the same man. He laid it down as a principle, that he would do his duty, be the consequence what it would; and that no intreaties, no persuasions, no dangers, should induce him to violate the commands, or to sacrifice the honour of his God. To what purpose do we enter into the way of righteousness, if we do not persevere in it? The importunities of those who would turn us aside from the path of duty, are to be considered as temptations of Satan by his emissaries; and shall they be set in opposition to the commands of God, or to the dictates of our own consciences? Would we listen to any man, if he persuaded us to inflict deadly wounds upon our bodies? But our bodies are less precious than our souls, to which every wilful sin gives a deadly stab.

At length "they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand," and whether he would not at last be constrained to yield to their advices. They appeared to be his friends, when they exhorted him to obey the king's commandment; but now they discover themselves to be his enemies, when they expose him to the vengeance of the haughty favourite. There are too many whose friendship is but little removed from enmity. They will shew you great kindness, if you suffer them to be your masters: but if you think it necessary to judge for yourselves what you are to do, they reckon themselves affronted. If you follow their example, they will praise your understanding; if you act in opposition to it, they consider your conduct as a libel on their own, and care not what mischiefs may be the consequence.

"For he had told them that he was a Jew."—And it seems they desired to see whether the Jews would be

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be allowed to observe, with impunity, their singular customs.

It was high time for the Jews to be strict in observing the laws of their God; those laws, especially, which prohibited the alienation of religious worship from their own God. They had already smarted severely for idolatry, and now it was necessary for them, unless they wished for utter extermination, to stand at the utmost distance from this fatal crime. We find in the Grecian history, that the Jews were not the only people who refused to give that homage which was required by the kings of Persia. The Athenians put Timagoras, one of their citizens, to death, for saluting the king of Persia in the Persian mode; and some of the soldiers of Alexander the Great rebelled against him, when he demanded from them the honours usually given to the kings of Persia. But these blind heathens acted rather upon the principle of honour, than of religion. They might have performed religious homage to the Persian monarchs as reasonably and innocently as to the ordinary objects of their worship. But the Jews were taught of God to worship himself alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, chose to give their bodies to the burning fire, rather than worship any other god than their own God: and Mordecai chose to run every hazard, rather than prostitute to a creature those honours which belonged exclusively to God his Maker.

Mordecai would not comply with the solicitations of the king's ministers: but he gave them a good reason why he would not do it, when "he told them that he was a Jew;" and that the laws of his fathers prohibited his compliance with their wishes.

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bade Esther to tell her people or her kindred: but, when occasion required, he was not ashamed to tell his own people, and kindred, and religion. Here he followed the example of David, "who would speak of God's testimonies before kings, and would not be ashamed." Why should any fearer of God, any follower of Jesus, be ashamed openly to avow his profession before the greatest of men? Nothing can be more shameful, than to be ashamed of our Creator and Redeemer. The followers of the Lamb have their Father's name written on their forehead.

VER. 5.—*And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.*

"Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence."—Was not Mordecai too full of scruples? Might he not have bent his body in civil homage, to which Haman was entitled by his station? He might then have been overlooked; the difference between his mode of paying homage, and that of the other servants of the king, might have been unobserved, and thus he might have escaped the danger that threatened him.

Mordecai would not surely have with-held civil homage from the king's favourite, although he was of the race of Agag, if he could have performed it without being supposed to give to him that religious respect which was paid to him by others. But he would have preferred peace to truth, and his own life to a good conscience, if he had rendered to him any kind of homage that would have been generally understood to contain the lowest acts of religious worship. It is a necessary duty to abstain from all

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appearance of evil. We must give no offence to any man, even by doing those things that are in themselves lawful. But when, without practising any acts of idolatry, we do those things which may lead weak brethren into idolatry, we sin against our brethren, and against Christ who died for them. It is an excellent story that is told of old Eleazar, 2 Mac. vii. who refusing to eat swine's flesh at the commandment of the king, his pitying, but weak friends, proposed to bring some other kind of flesh to him, that he might eat it as swine's flesh, and thus escape the torments prepared for him. But the good man would by no means sully his old age with the reproach of simulation to save his life; nor lay a stumbling-block before the younger Jews, by giving them any appearance of reason to think that he had done a thing so contrary to the laws of his fathers. He chose rather to bear the cruel effects of the royal indignation, than to flinch, even in appearance, from that good profession which he had maintained for ninety years; and Mordecai would rather encounter all the rage of an haughty favourite, than do any action which might prove a stumbling-block to any of his brethren of the children of Israel.

Haman was full of wrath, when he heard and saw that Mordecai refused him that homage which was given him by every other man, without excepting even the highest of the king's princes. How dreadfully this wrath flamed in his bosom, we learn from the method which he took to express it. We may observe, at present, what misery pride, by its own nature, and inseparable consequences, brings upon men. No proud man ever received all that respect

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or was treated with all that delicacy of regard, which he thought his due. Now pride, mortified by neglect or contempt, kindles a fire in the soul, which burns, and torments, and destroys. What man can be more miserable than he who burns for vengeance upon the objects of his displeasure, but torments himself in the first place by a fire which he is constantly feeding within his own bowels?

A wise man would have overlooked the supposed injury, and respected, or at the worst pitied, scruples that appeared to him unreasonable. Haman's master would have probably smiled at the singularity of Mordecai's behaviour. It is said that Darius, grandfather to this prince, was once, on a journey, solicited by one of his attendants to give him his embroidered robe, which happened to be torn. The king, knowing that it was a capital crime, by the laws of Persia, for any subject to wear the king's robe, gave it to the man, with a strict prohibition from wearing it. He no sooner, however, received it, than he dressed himself in the gorgeous robe. When the king's other attendants were filled with indignation, the king said, I give him leave, as a woman, to wear the embroidery, and as a madman, to wear the robe. If Haman had passed over the supposed indignity with such a jest, he might have saved himself from much misery, and would have lost none of his honours. But none are so proud as men raised from a dunghill to a seat near the throne. Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, whom we suppose to be the king Ahasuerus of this book, had Jews in their courts, who certainly did not give them honours unfit for men to receive, and yet those princes shewed them great favour. But the upstart minion thought

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thought no punishment too severe for a man that would not honour him as a god. May God preserve us all from unexpected heights of prosperity, or give us grace to bear such dangerous changes in our condition as becometh saints!

VER. 6.—*And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman thought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.*

Pride thirsts for the blood of those by whom it is wounded. And this is certainly enough, and too much, for its gratification. When the Pharisees and priests were hurt by the fame and by the testimony of Jesus, they sought to destroy him; and his own blood would have been sufficient, whilst he lived among them, to satiate their fury. When they sent a band of men with Judas to apprehend him, they gave them no commission to apprehend his disciples along with him. But the wound given to the pride of Haman was too sore and deep to be healed by the blood of Mordecai alone. The blood of a thousand, the blood of ten thousand men, was not sufficient. The whole nation of the Jews must be sacrificed to his revenge. In some barbarous nations, atrocious crimes are punished, not with the death of the malefactor only, but with the death of every member of his family, or of all his kindred. The fury of Haman is not satisfied with the destruction of Mordecai, and of all his father's house; all the Jews throughout the wide-extended empire of Ahasuerus were no more than a sufficient sacrifice to his revenge.

They were "the people of Mordecai." This was his

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his quarrel with them. Was this a reason for their destruction? Let Mordecai be the worst of men, it does not follow that all his countrymen must be wicked. If a whole nation were to be extirpated when a single atrocious criminal is to be found amongst them, all the nations of the world must have been long ago rooted out of the land of the living, and the earth left one large desart for lions, and tigers, and bears, and wolves, to prey upon the weaker animals. But the wrath of man cannot hear the voice of reason and justice. It wants ears, but it has a loud voice, crying, Blood, blood. If you desire to hold your innocence, give no ear to its clamours. Make it to appear that you have learned the truth as it is in Jesus, "by putting off the old man with his deeds, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts." Among other lusts, "put away all malice and envies." "Be ye angry and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil." Your wrath may prove very troublesome to the persons against whom it is directed; but it will be beyond comparison more troublesome to yourselves. The wrath of Haman drew many tears and sighs from Mordecai: but it drew down fearful vengeance upon Haman himself, and upon all his family. God give us all that "wisdom which is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," James, iii. 17.

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DISCOURSE VI.

HAMAN OBTAINS FROM THE KING A DECREE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWS.—CHAP. iii. 7.—14.

VER. 7.—*In the first month, (that is the month Nisan), in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.*

THE meaning plainly is, that on the twelfth day of the month Nisan, they cast lots with reference to all the days and months of the year, to know what would be the lucky month for the business in agitation. The Vulgate translation runs thus:—"On what day, and in what month, the Jews ought to be slain." And the twelfth month, which is called Adar, came forth.

It was the reproach of some of the Jewish kings, that they observed times. But it was common among the heathens to make a distinction between lucky and

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and unlucky days. By this superstitious distinction, they sometimes suffered opportunities to be lost which could never be recalled, and thereby exposed themselves to great losses, or to extreme dangers.

The business which Haman had now in contemplation was important, and might prove dangerous. He therefore endeavours to discover the will of the gods by the use of the lot, concerning the most proper time for executing his purpose. But there was surely another point which ought previously to have been determined, whether he should attempt to execute his purpose, or forbear. It might have occurred to him, that possibly there was no time at all in which it would be safe to undertake an enterprise so full of horror. But his passions blinded him. The enterprise must be undertaken. He cannot enjoy life, unless his enemies are destroyed. The time only is referred to the lot; and, through the good providence of God, it directs him to a very distant day, at the end of not less than eleven months.

Little did Haman know that the whole disposing of lots belonged to the God of that people whom he proposed to exterminate from the earth, and that of consequence the season pointed out by the lot was likely not to be the best season for executing his purpose, but the most proper season for preventing the execution of it, and for turning the meditated vengeance upon his own head. "The wicked is snared in the works of his own hands." Whilst he crouches and humbles himself, and uses every artifice, that the poor may fall by his strong ones, he is, in effect, spreading snares for himself.

VER. 8.—*And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There*

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There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people, in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.

It is surprising that it could ever come into the mind of any man, to seek the destruction of a whole nation for an offence given him by one man. But it is far more surprising that Haman could ever have the audacity to propose it to his sovereign, and to a sovereign known to be of a humane disposition. He stood high in the favour of his prince; but did he not risk the total loss of that favour by a proposal so evidently unjust and inhumane? Why did he not dread the wrath of the king, which is as messengers of death? Might he not have heard such words as these, in answer to his proposal: 'Audacious wretch! what hast thou seen in me that thou shouldest hope to make me the murderer of my people? Man of blood! thou scruplest not to seek the destruction, at one blow, of thousands of my subjects, upon a vague unsupported charge which thou bringest against them! Wilt thou not another day follow the example of Bigthan and Teresh? Wilt thou be more afraid to lay thy hand upon one man, though a king, than upon many thousands of my subjects, who have done thee no wrong?'

But Haman had his reasons to justify his strange proposal to the king. The people whose destruction he sought were a contemptible people, scattered through every province of the king's dominions. They had laws peculiar to themselves, and they were not observers of the king's laws.

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They were scattered through every province of the king's dominions. He speaks as if they had no country which deserved to be called their own. This, however, was not a fact, for the nation of Israel was now brought back to its own land; and although many of them still continued to dwell in foreign lands, were they therefore to be marked out for slaughter? Was Ahasuerus to make his name infamous among all nations, and to all posterity, by imitating the example of the tyrant Busiris, whose custom it was to sacrifice all strangers that he found in the land of Egypt, where he reigned? If the Jews must die because they dwell not in the land of their fathers, let Haman himself, and all the remnant of Amalek, perish. They have been brought, by the revolutions of time, or by the providence of God, into a condition still more contemptible than that of the Jews.

"And their laws are diverse from all people."—True. But is this a reason why they should be destroyed, before it be considered whether these laws are better or worse than the laws of other people? Let this be considered, before this people be condemned for having such laws. Have they laws to authorise murder, treason, hatred of mankind, robbery, or adultery? Then let them be compelled to abjure such laws, or be rooted out of the land of the living: But if their laws be found to be the best in the world, let it be acknowledged that this nation is a wise and understanding people, unless they are found careless about their own laws, and disposed rather to observe other rules of conduct.

But this was another charge against them, that they were too observant of their own laws, and did not

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not regard the laws of the king. It is, indeed, a great crime, in most cases, to disobey the laws of the country where we dwell, and of the king under whose protection we live. Unless the king's authority be respected, good order cannot be maintained; nor can men be secured in their life, property, and honours, where kings do not enforce obedience to their good laws. Yet there are cases in which it is a virtue to transgress the laws of the greatest king. What if the laws of God are contrary to them? Kings themselves are but subjects to the everlasting King; and as subjects are bound to disobey their superior fellow-subjects when they require them to do things inconsistent with the laws of the king, so all subjects are bound to respect the will of God, in opposition to the will of an earthly sovereign. Nothing, indeed, can be more wicked than to violate good laws, under pretence of conscience towards God. But wise princes themselves will respect those men most amongst their subjects, who are least disposed to sacrifice their highest duties to complaisance for princes. The Emperor Constantius, father to Constantine the Great, once commanded all his Christian servants to offer sacrifices to the gods of Rome. If they refused to obey his command, they were to be dismissed from his service. Many of them obeyed; others did not, and accordingly were dismissed. But in a day or two he turned out all who had complied with his orders, and recalled those whom he had expelled, saying, that those would be most faithful to their prince, who were most faithful to their God; and that he would not trust men who were false to their religion.

VER. 9.—*If it please the king, let it be written*

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they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

"If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed."—Why? They are a worthless people, "for they are scattered over all the king's dominions, and live according to their own singular laws, without observing the king's laws; and therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them to live." And must the lives of hundreds of thousands be sacrificed to a vague unproved accusation? If the Jews are a scattered people, that is their misfortune, rather than their sin. If they have singular institutions derived from their fathers, are they to be blamed for observing them, before it is proved that they are wicked, or inconsistent with the safety of other men's lives and property? It was commonly held among the heathens to be a virtue, rather than a vice, for men to respect the laws of their fathers. If they did not observe the king's laws, let them be punished for it, unless they can prove that their consciences required them to act as they did, but let them be punished according to the nature of their offence. The king's laws were not the laws of Draco the Athenian, which were said to be written in blood, because he made every fault capital. He thought that the smallest faults deserved death, and for the greatest crime he could find no greater punishment.

"It is not for the king's profit to suffer such men to live;" and therefore let them be put to death. But will it be profit to the king to put them to death? Will he derive much pleasure or advantage from the guilt of an hundred thousand murders, from the execrations

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of all his surviving subjects, and of all generations of mankind, from the horrors of a self-accusing conscience, and from the prospect of the vengeance which the Creator of mankind may be expected to inflict on the destroyers of the work of his hands?

But the profit of which Haman chiefly thought, was the flourishing state of the royal revenue. This nation was so poor, that the revenue would not be lessened by its destruction. If, however, the king was under any apprehensions that his revenue would suffer damage, Haman proposes to make a full equivalent by paying into the king's treasuries ten thousand talents, which make several millions of our money. This sum he probably intended to raise in part out of the effects of the condemned nation, and to make up what was wanting from his own private estate. His revenge was so dear to him, that he would not only hazard the king's favour by the horrid proposal of murdering a whole nation, but expose himself to a severe loss in his fortune, rather than suffer the hated race to live. What liberal sacrifices will men make to their passions! They will give a great part of the substance of their house for the gratification of their hatred or their lust. Why then should we think it an hard matter to give a part of our substance to God? If our desires are as eager for the advancement of virtue and purity, if we are as earnest in our wishes to have the wants of the poor supplied, and the afflictions of the unfortunate relieved, as revengeful men, like Haman, are to gratify their ill-nature, it will give us pleasure to honour the Lord with our substance, and to minister to the necessities of our fellow-men.

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VER. 10. 11.—*And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the Jews enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.*

Here we see the danger of despotism, and the value of liberty. Ahasuerus was none of the worst of princes. Humanity appeared to characterise his government; and we find him, in an unguarded hour, and in the effusions of his friendship to an unworthy favourite, giving his consent to a massacre, which, if it had been perpetrated, must have ranked him with the most odious tyrants that ever lived. What tyrant ever consigned a whole nation of subjects to destruction by a single decree? Caligula, it is said, wished that the whole Roman people had but one neck, that he might cut it off at a single blow. Yet we do not read that he ever attempted to destroy at one blow any of the numerous nations that were subject to the Roman empire. But Ahasuerus complaments Haman with the lives of a whole nation scattered through all his dominions, without putting himself to the trouble of asking what proof Haman had of the crimes, if they could be called crimes, that were laid to their charge. The mischief of arbitrary power and of slavery in nations, lies not chiefly in the insecurity of life, and of property, but in the tendency which they both have to corrupt the hearts and the morals of men. Could any man, not invested with unlimited power, have ever thought of making such a horrid present to one of his favourites? When men are taught that they may do what they please, they

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they must be exempted from the weaknesses and vices incident to human nature, if they always confine their pleasure within the limits which men must prescribe to themselves, who are limited by laws. Bondage under masters of unlimited power, has, on the other side, a strong tendency to debase and vitiate the soul. No wise man will wish to possess the power of doing evil. Every subject of a free government is no less bound to be thankful to God for that precious blessing, than for food and raiment.

Ahasuerus appears to have been a man of an easy temper, and ready to confer the greatest obligations, without deliberation, on those whom he loved. But there is no true virtue without judgement and steadiness. A thoughtless man, of an easy temper, is more likely to turn out a vicious than a virtuous character; because in a world where so many more bad than good men are to be met with, he is likely to give up himself to the guidance of those who will lead him out of the way of understanding; or if he should be led in the right path by some of his friends, there are others that will lead him out of it. Ahasuerus would have heaped favours upon the Jews, if Mordecai had been to him at this time what Haman was. If he was the prince whom we take him to have been, he had already conferred very high favours upon the Jews in the seventh year of his reign, Ezra, vii.: And now, at the distance of five years, he signs a death-warrant for the whole nation, without knowing or thinking what he was doing. He does not appear to have so much as asked what that nation was which Haman solicited him to destroy. For aught he knew,

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he was giving consent to a decree for the destruction of his beloved queen, and of Mordecai, to whom he was indebted for his life. He now takes his ring, and gives it to Haman, to sign what decrees he pleased to make. How did he know that Haman would not sign a decree for his own deposition or death? Some say that Semiramis obtained her husband's permission to reign for five days, and in that time ordered her husband to be slain, that she might get perpetual possession of his throne.

Many have not duly distinguished between an easy and a good temper. An easy temper is a very dangerous one, when it is not under the powerful restraints of wisdom. It is vain to boast of a ready compliance with every good motion suggested to us, if we are equally ready to comply with bad motions. If we surrender ourselves to the direction of our friends, we may soon find that we have given up ourselves to our enemies. He is not our friend who desires to be our lord. A true friend will wish us to behave like men, and like Christians; and if we are Christians, we must not be slaves of the best of men on earth. "Ye are bought with a price."—"Be not ye the servants of men, but of the Lord Christ. Please men for their good to edification." Be always ready to grant reasonable requests, and to follow good counsels. But you must judge for yourselves by the light which God hath given you, what requests are lawful to be granted, and what counsels are worthy to be followed.

"The silver is given to thee, and the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee."—Observe in what light this prince viewed his people. He

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He considered them as a part of his goods and chattels, of which he was at liberty to dispose at his pleasure. Unhappy the people whose kings are trained up in such notions: Still more unhappy the princes whose minds are swelled, and their hearts vitiated, by such conceits of their own powers. And yet, if the people had been as entirely the king's property, as cattle are the property of the husbandman who rears them, would he have been justified in transferring his right to an avowed butcher? The husbandman incurs no blame by giving up to the slaughter those animals that may be used as food; but if he should give up to the slaughter those beasts that are used in work only, would he not greatly abuse his power, and incur the just charge of wanton cruelty? A good man regardeth the life of his beast. A proud man little regards the life of his fellow-men in the lower ranks of life.

VER. 12.—*Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written, according to all that Haman had commanded, unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, to the rulers of every people of every province, according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language. In the name of Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring.*

The wickedness of the intended massacre does not rest with Ahasuerus and Haman. Great multitudes of the king's subjects must participate in the guilt. The governors and rulers of every province, and the people under their command, have letters written to them, sealed with the king's seal, to contribute their part to the massacre. Let the great consider what they

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they do. If they are wicked, they are not wicked alone. They make others sharers with them in their guilt: and whilst they make their inferiors sin, they may expect to bear their execrations in hell for bringing them along with themselves to that place of torment.

These men were greatly to be pitied who lived under an absolute government, because, in many instances, they would find it necessary either to sin against their own souls, or to offend a prince whose frown was death. We ought to bless God that no man hath power to require us to do any thing but according to the known laws of the land: And yet men of true virtue will not comply with the will of the most absolute monarchs, when it is not consistent with the laws of justice and of mercy. At the famous Bartholomew massacre, when the King of France sent his orders to the commanders in the different provinces, to massacre the Huguenots, one of them returned him this answer: "In my district your Majesty has many brave soldiers, but no butchers." That virtuous governor never felt any effects of the royal resentment. It is to be feared that few of the Persian governors would have given such proofs of virtuous courage, if the king's edict had not been reversed. We find none of all the governors of the provinces of the Babylonian empire, that refused to bow their knees to the graven image which Nebuchadnezzar the king set up. The subjects of princes who rule with unlimited dominion, are for the most part slaves both in body and in soul. They are taught from their earliest days, by the examples which they see

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see around them, to consider their princes as gods on earth, whose will must not be disputed.

VER. 13.—*And the letters were sent by posts unto all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, (which is the month Adar), and to take the spoil of them for a prey.*

Malice must have blinded the eyes of that wicked man to a strange degree. He gives as the reason why he would have the hated nation destroyed, "That they did not keep the king's laws;" but in the edict against them are comprehended many thousands who could not possibly break them. The little children, who could neither do good nor evil, may reasonably be supposed to make a fourth or fifth part of the whole nation. There might be supposed, at least, as many in the whole nation of the Jews as at Nineveh in the days of Jonah, who could not discern between their right hand and their left. The king's humanity must have revolted at the thought of shedding the blood of so many innocents, as soon as he reflected calmly on this horrible decree. It is said, that one of the hardened bigots who killed many of the Protestants in the Irish massacre, found his conscience tormented as long as he lived, with the thought of some babes whom he had stabbed in the heat of his zeal. Their images often presented themselves to his fancy, and inflicted severer pangs than the gibbet could have done. What, then, must a prince, naturally of a clement disposition, have thought in his moments of reflection, concerning a favourite who had, in an unguarded moment, persuade[illegible]

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to give a death-warrant against the poor babes of a whole nation, who could not in any manner offend him, as well as against their fathers and mothers, who had done nothing to offend him, but by observing the laws of their fathers? Although Providence had not so wonderfully interposed to turn Haman's mischief upon his own head, it is very probable he would not long have escaped the vengeance of his misguided prince, who could not have forgiven himself nor his favourite the guilt of so many causeless murders.

The Jews are the people expressly mentioned as the unhappy objects of this bloody edict. Haman did not know that Esther herself, no less than Mordecai, was included in this intended prescription. Had any one drawn his sword against the queen's life, what punishment could justly have been inflicted upon him by the king, when he could produce a warrant sealed with the king's seal?

But there was another point of still more importance unknown to this enemy of the Jews, that they were a nation which could not be extirpated, because they were under the special protection of the God of heaven. The malice of Haman could no more frustrate the ancient oracles relating to the Jews, than it could pull the sun out of the firmament, and deprive the world of the light of day. "The sceptre was not to depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh should come." The Shiloh was not yet come. Judah must therefore continue a distinct nation, under governors that proceeded from himself. Haman's malice will be so far from finding

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finding the means of extirpating Judah, that the glory of that people, though eclipsed, must again shine forth as the morning.

VER. 14.—*The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province, was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.*

Nebuchadnezzar gathered the governors of all his provinces to Babylon, that they might witness the honours done to the graven image that he had set up. But the event was very different from his expectation. They all saw the disgrace of the worshippers of graven images, and the glory of the God of Israel, who preserved his faithful servants in the midst of that fire, which consumed the king's servants that cast them into the furnace. Thus Haman caused the edict against the Jews to be published in the language of every people, that they might all be prepared to bear their part in the destruction of the Jews. But the enemies of Israel had one thing in view, and the God of Israel quite another. Haman intended to make the destruction of Judah as sure as possible, but God intended to make all nations attentive witnesses of his power and wisdom displayed in counteracting the designs of their enemies, and accomplishing their salvation. The effect of such an edict would be the fixing of all men's attention on the event; and the event was to make it evident, that there was no god like the God of Israel, nor any people on the earth so much the care of Heaven, as that nation which was held in abhorrence by Haman.

VER. 15.—*The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace: and the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed.*

Haman

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Haman was in great haste to publish the decree through all parts of the king's dominions, though it was not to be executed till eleven months were elapsed from the time when it was enacted. His intention was, that every thing should be in readiness for the execution on the proper day. But did he not outwit himself? Would it not have been much better to have kept it a profound secret till it could be a secret no longer? Had he no reason to think that there might be some one or other in the king's large extended dominions that might befriend the oppressed nation, and make the king sensible how much he had been imposed upon? What if some one of the king's noble princes, envying Haman's credit, might take the advantage which the atrocious cruelty and injustice of the decree gave him, of opening the king's eyes to the wickedness of his conduct? The Jews themselves, at least, might be expected to adopt some measure, either to preserve themselves, or to sell their lives dear. What if despair should inspire them with courage to aim a deadly blow at the head of this oppressor? They could make the attempt without risking their lives, when they were already under sentence of death. Their losing their lives a few months sooner than the time fixed, would be a relief to them from so many months of anguish.

In the folly of Haman's conduct, we see the wisdom of God over-ruling the counsels of the wicked, to serve his own purposes, and infatuating them, that he might destroy them. The Jews have time to pray, and confess their sins. The terror into which they were thrown, would put them in mind of him who was "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the

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the time of trouble." God himself was in the mean time whetting his sword, and making it ready. He was preparing for him the instruments of death, that the violent dealing of the wicked Haman might come down upon his own head.

Haman, in the mean time, gives up himself to pleasure and jollity, in which he had the honour to be companion to the king. He will soon find that "the end of this mirth is heaviness." The city Shushan was perplexed, when the king and Haman were enjoying this merriment. What heart could be free from perplexity on such an occasion? The Jews were known to be as innocent as their neighbours. Many of them resided in the city of Shushan. The prospect of their miserable and unmerited fate was terrible. Who could tell where such mischiefs were to end? Haman might next day petition his deluded master to compliment him with a like sacrifice of other lives. The people of Shushan at this time would be in much the same state of mind with a Persian minister of state in later times, who said, that he never left the king's presence without putting his hand to his head, that he might feel whether it was still standing on his shoulders.

We have reason to bless God that most men in civilized nations feel an abhorrence at bloody crimes. Many who scruple not to lie, or to cheat, would be struck with horror at the guilt of murder in themselves or others. Many and gracious are the methods used by God for the security of the life of that favourite creature which he made after his own image. May we spend those lives to his glory, which are protracted by his goodness!

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DISCOURSE VII.

THE GRIEF OF MORDECAI AND THE OTHER JEWS AT HEARING OF THE BLOODY EDICT. MORDECAI SOLICITS ESTHER TO INTERCEDE WITH THE KING ON THEIR BEHALF.—CHAP. iv.

VER. 1.—*When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry.*

MORDECAI was watchful over the interests of his people, and deeply affected with all their concerns *. Judge, then, what must have been his feelings, when he was informed that an edict had passed for their destruction! But what was still more distressing to him, was the consideration that himself was the occasion of it. He could not reflect upon his own conduct, indeed, as the proper cause of the mischief. He had done nothing but what his conscience approved, and what he still resolved to do in similar circumstances.

* Chap. x.

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circumstances *. And who could ever have imagined that the revenge of Haman would have extended farther than his own life? But still he must have been penetrated with bitter anguish at the thought, that the sanguinary decree originated in Haman's revenge against his own conduct: And, as David told Abiathar that he had been the death of all the persons of his father's house, so he might be reflected on by the Jews as the death of every person of their nation. With cutting reflections he would think on the day when he first entered into the king's service. If he had not been one of the men that sat in the king's gate, he might never have seen Haman's face, and the decree would never have been thought of. Why did he still reside in a foreign land, when he might have been a dweller in the Holy Land, with his brethren who had returned from their captivity? Why had he not rather chosen the meanest condition, which would have kept him at a distance from kings and courts, than a situation which had so unhappily involved himself and all his people in the danger of utter extermination? Had a sentence of death been pronounced upon himself, had his beloved Esther and all the persons of his father's house been comprehended in the sentence, his grief would have been very great, but no way comparable to what he felt from the present danger of all his people.

Poor Mordecai had it not in his power to confine his anguish to his own bosom, or to his own house. He published it through all the city of Shushan. You need not ask for what reasons persons overwhelmed with grief do not inquire what purpose the publi-

* Chap. v.

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tion of their grief may serve. The strong impulse of sorrow often makes them publish their complaints to the winds or to the trees. Yet who knows what good end it might serve to announce the unmerited calamity of the Jews through the whole city of Shushan? There might be some compassionate hearts amongst the people, that would be interested by such a dire calamity: and though the people had no direct access to the king, yet they could present their supplications to the counsellors who saw his face; or if nothing could be gained, nothing could be lost, by men already doomed to death.

We are not, after all, to suppose that Mordecai's sorrow was altogether hopeless. His faith in God might be shaken, but it was not destroyed. He could not be ignorant of the many precious promises concerning the Lord's redeemed captives, which were to be found in the prophecies of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Ezekiel, and of many other prophets. The Jews, restored to their land, or scattered among the nations, might be sore vexed, but they could not be utterly destroyed. God's promise could not fail for evermore. "Deliverance," said Mordecai, "shall rise up to the Jews." Yet he did not know how or when it would arise. He did not know but many might lose their lives before deliverance came. He mourned sore, although he did not mourn like one that had no hope.

VER. 2.—*And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.*

Mordecai might go where he pleased with his sackcloth and ashes, excepting only to that place where his duty required his attendance. Not those

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who are clothed in garments of heaviness, but those who wear gay clothing, are in kings' palaces. Within the gates of the palace of Shushan, badges of sorrow were criminal. The king could not banish trouble of heart; he could not banish sickness, or vexation, or death from his palace; but he banished all those ordinary signs by which grief is expressed. The maker of this law was certainly of a different judgement from a much wiser king, who advises men to go to the house of mourning rather than the house of feasting*. We have heard of princes that forbade death to be mentioned in their presence. How terrible must the harbingers of death have been to those great personages! Since the last enemy must be encountered by the greatest as well as the least of our race, is it not far better to be prepared for meeting him, than to banish him from our thoughts?

VER. 3.—*And in every province whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

"In this day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth:" and the call was so loud and awful that it commanded compliance. All that loved their lives, all that loved their friends and brethren, mourned bitterly, and refused to be comforted. All that had any impression of religion among the Jews, joined religious fasting to their expressions of grief, that they might pour out tears unto God. And there is reason to believe, that religious impressions would

* Eccles. vii. 2.

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be now felt even by those who had forgotten God in their days of prosperity.

If a sentence of death pronounced by an earthly sovereign produced such grief, such anxiety, such cries for deliverance, what impression ought to be made on the minds of sinners by that sentence which is passed against them in the court of heaven! "Judgement is come upon all men to condemnation." We are still under that sentence of condemnation, if we are not in Christ Jesus. Surely we believe neither law nor gospel, if we can enjoy peace in our own minds, without the humble hope of mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

VER. 4.—*So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came, and told it her: then was the queen exceedingly grieved, and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.*

Esther was advanced to the highest station which a woman could fill. She dwelt in a magnificent palace, where she might fare sumptuously, if she pleased, every day. Her wardrobe was filled with a rich profusion of raiment embroidered with gold. She was attended by maids and chamberlains devoted to her will. But did she find happiness in that magnificence which surrounded her, or in the riches which she might use, or abuse, at her pleasure? She might, indeed, be thankful that her condition was such as it was, when she considered the humiliating condition of the other ladies of the king. But her palace was a prison. She could not enjoy the society of her former friends, or even of her beloved Mordecai. She was, at this time, ignorant of the pitiable condition of her nation.

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She was cut off from her wonted sources of pleasure, and the man ot whom she must now devote her life seemed almost to have forgotten her. The happiness of men and women is by no means proportioned to their station, their riches, their power, or their manner of living. There are vexations annexed to greatness, of which the poor have little apprehension; and there are comforts within the reach of the poor as little known to the great. Those who know the world will see little reason to envy their superiors; and the great have no reason to look down with disdain upon the lowest ranks.

Esther, in her elevation, and in her separation from her friends, was far from forgetting them. She was deeply afflicted when she heard of the mourning habit and sore affliction of Mordecai. She was vexed that he should appear at the king's gate in a dress in which he could not enter it, and therefore sent to him change of raiment. But she knew not the sources of his distress. Grief so firmly rooted, and so well founded, could not be removed without a removal of its cause. To send him change of raiment, was like singing songs to a heavy heart. Mordecai was doubtless pleased with her kind attention; but she must do something of a very different nature to banish his sorrows.

VER. 5.—*Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was.*

If we weep in sincerity with those that weep, it will be our desire, if possible, to remove their sorrows. But to this end it is necessary to know their

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cause. Physicians cannot administer proper medicines to their patients, unless they know the cause of their diseases. They may palliate the symptoms, but the root of the distemper remains, if the cause is not removed. So, we may soothe the minds of persons labouring under grief, and cause them for a time to forget their sorrows; but if they are rooted in the mind, they will soon recover their force, and hold the soul in misery, unless the causes are removed: And these cannot be removed but by a change in those outward circumstances which occasioned them, or by a change in the state of the mind, when it is convinced that the supposed causes do not exist, or that they are not sufficient grounds for the sorrows they occasioned, or that relief or consolations may be found, of virtue sufficient to counteract their force.

Esther could not now visit Mordecai, or call him to her palace, and therefore, conversing with him by means of a third person, inquires into the causes of his distress, with a sincere intention to do every thing in her power to set his heart at ease.

VER. 6. 7. 8.—*So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city which was before the king's gate; and Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews to destroy them: Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her; and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for the people.*

It is unpleasant to be the messenger of bad tidings. It is, however, often useful. If a physician saw you labouring

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labouring under a mortal distemper, and insensible to your danger, he is the preserver of your life, when, by warning you of the peril of your condition, he rouses your fear, and excites to apply the proper remedy. Esther must have been shocked beyond measure at hearing of a sentence of death pronounced against her dearest friends, against her whole people, against herself, by the man who had raised her to a share in his bed, and in his throne, without a crime proved against any one of them. But it was better to hear of it at present, than ten or eleven months afterwards, when it would be too late to provide a remedy.

There are some who cannot bear to hear of any bad tidings, however true, and think those men their enemies who tell them the truth. They consider those friends or preachers as their enemies who speak to them of their sins, and of the judgements of God denounced against them. But was not Esther under deep obligations to Mordecai for informing her of the danger of her people, and urging her to exert her influence for preserving them? Whether was Ahab most indebted to those prophets who told him that the Lord was with him, and would give him victory at Ramoth-Gilead, or to him who told him that he would fall in the battle? By following the counsel of the former, he lost his life; he might have preserved it, if he had believed the latter.

It is indeed cruel to distress men by false or doubtful intelligence of calamities that have not happened, or, if they have happened, cannot be remedied. Mordecai was far from wishing to disquiet the mind of his royal friend by uncertain rumours. But he had too good intelligence to be mistaken, and puts into her

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her hands decisive proofs of the danger of her people, and of Haman's activity in procuring their ruin. Nor did he give her this intelligence to torment her before the time. If nothing could have been done to avert the danger, he might have permitted her to enjoy tranquillity till it could be concealed no longer. But who could tell what might be the result of supplication to the king, especially from a queen who was understood to be the object of his warmest love! He therefore desires, or rather requires, her to go in and make intercession to the king for the people, and for her own life.

Mordecai uses authority in his language to the queen, and does her great honour by using such language. He durst not have charged her to do her duty, if he had not known her humbleness of mind in her greatness. She was as much disposed as in her youngest days to give him the authority of a father; and this he knew so well that he uses it without scruple or apology. Happy are the men on whom prosperity makes no change but for the better!

He charges her to make intercession to the king. The knowledge of that dreadful situation in which the Jews were placed, was to be improved by all the Jews as a call to fasting and intercession with the God of heaven, on whom their hope was to rest. But it was to be improved by the queen in particular, as a motive to the exertion of all her influence with the king. All, according to their places and stations, are bound to do what they can to avert threatened miseries from their nation. But some are bound to do much more than others, because they have peculiar opportunities, which, if they are not improved, must render

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render them in some degree accountable for the mischiefs consequent on their neglect. Those who can do nothing by their own power, may do much by their influence with others. In the reign of the bloody Jehoiakim, the princes of Judah saved Jeremiah from his hands. If these princes had not used their influence for this purpose, they must have shared in the guilt of his blood.

VER. 9.—*And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.*

"A faithful messenger refresheth the soul of him that sent him." Hatach was a faithful messenger, and yet he stunned his employer. But refreshment to her soul was the consequence, in due time, of his fidelity, and of Mordecai's firmness.

VER. 10. 11.—*Again, Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai: All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live; but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.*

Esther was not unwilling, but she was afraid, to go in unto the king. She does not absolutely refuse; but she objects against compliance with Mordecai's charge. If Mordecai can find out no other probable means of safety, she will undertake the business: but she earnestly desires to be excused, if some other can be found to undertake the cause, whose interest with the king may be greater than her's.

Some are too ready to undertake services for w[illegible]

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they are unqualified. But dangerous services are too often declined by those who are both called to undertake them, and best qualified to execute them. Moses was eminently qualified by God to be the deliverer of Israel from Egypt, and clearly called; and yet he earnestly desired God to excuse him; and this he did again and again on various pretences, till he saw God's anger kindled against him. Let us never trust to ourselves, as if we were able of ourselves to think so much as a good thought. But let us never distrust God, as if he would "send us a warfare on our own charges." If we can believe, "all things are possible to him that believeth;" "when he is weak, then he is strong."

Danger of death is one of Esther's objections against undertaking this business. This too was one secret reason that made Moses so unwilling to undertake the work of delivering Israel. There is a strong love of life implanted in us by God, and it is not easy to give up life even to him that gave it. There are few so courageous as Paul, who was moved by nothing that is grievous to other men; and who counted not life itself dear to him, that he might finish his course with joy. But when we compare Paul's courage with the fears of Moses or Esther, or other Old-Testament believers, let us remember the advantages that Paul enjoyed above them, by living in that happy period when Jesus had "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel."

But why was Esther so afraid of her life, if she should make intercession to the king for the life of her people? Was it so criminal in the court of Persia to present a supplication to the king? Or, if it was a crime

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crime in others, was it a crime even in the queen? Yes; it was universally known, says Esther, and Mordecai could not well be ignorant of it, that if any person should venture, uncalled, to approach the king in the inner court of his palace, he must be put to death, unless the king was pleased graciously to pardon him; nor was the queen herself excepted from the penalties of this law. The laws of the Persians were strange indeed! No man was allowed in a mourning-habit to enter into the king's gate; and no man in any apparel was allowed to come near the king in the inner court. Did these kings ever consider for what end they were elevated above their fellow-men? Was it not to defend the poor and the afflicted, and to do judgement and justice to all their people? How could they do the duties of princes, if they were inaccessible to their people? But if it was a crime to intrude into the private apartments of the palace, and to disturb the privacy of the prince, was it one of those atrocious crimes that can be justly punished with death? Could no milder punishment assuage the wrath of a proud mortal, who wished to make himself invisible like his Maker? Surely it may be said of a law that punished an offence like this with death, that it was written in blood; and of a government which would establish such laws, that Daniel had too good reason to represent it by the emblem of a bear *.

Blessed be God the laws of heaven are not like those of the Persians! Our King who dwells on high, is at all times accessible to the afflicted mourner. The poor and the afflicted had ready access to Jesus

* Dan. vii. 5.

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while he was upon the earth; nor is he less accessible in his state of glory. At all times we may come near to God, even to his throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Esther was believed by Mordecai to be a great favourite with the king; and doubtless there was a time when she was very dear to him. But Esther was afraid that this time was past, and questioned whether Mordecai would insist upon the charge he had given her, when he was informed, that for thirty days past she had not been called to go in unto the king. This she considered as a sign that his affection was alienated, and that it was questionable whether the golden sceptre would be held out to her, if she should presume to enter the king's apartment. What reason the king had for this coldness to his virtuous queen, we know not. This is plain, that it was a providential trial appointed for Esther, by which it would be known whether she had the courage to serve her people and her God at the risk of her life. It was a severe trial of her faith and charity. She felt the force of the discouragement, and expressed her sense of it to Mordecai, that she might receive further directions from him.

To whatever difficult duty we are called, we may lay our account with trials. If thou desirest to serve the Lord, look for temptation. But remember, that "the man is blessed who endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive of the Lord the crown of life which he hath promised to them that love him." Those who have held on in the path of duty,

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duty, under sore temptation, shall at last "stand before the throne of God with white robes, and palms in their hands." "But the fearful and unbelieving shall have their portion in the lake of fire burning with brimstone, which is the second death."

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DISCOURSE VII.

MORDECAI INSISTS ON THE CHARGE TO ESTHER TO GO IN UNTO THE KING. SHE COMPLIES WITH HIS DESIRE, BUT REQUIRES HIM TO PROCURE FOR HER THE HELP OF THE SOLEMN PRAYERS OF ALL THE JEWS IN SHUSHAN.—CHAP. iv. 12.—17.

VER. 12. 13.—*And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.*

IT is necessary for those who desire to be useful to the souls of their neighbours, not only to tell them, as occasion requires, what it is their duty to do, but to repeat their admonitions, to enforce them by reasons, and to obviate those objections which rise up in their minds against the performance of it. Those who desire a good increase from the seed sown in their fields, must plow the ground over and over, if it is stiff; must root up the weeds, must cover the seed with the harrow.

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harrow. In like manner, instructors must often repeat their good advices, and enforce them by arguments, and make it to appear how weak those reasons are which our slothful dispositions set in opposition to our duty. Eli admonished his sons to repent; but he did not follow up his admonitions with new reproofs, and warnings, and corrections. For this reason, the Lord reproved Eli himself as an accessary to the sin of his children. Mordecai charged Esther to go in unto the king; but when Esther wished to be excused, he did not satisfy himself with what he had already done, as if he had already discharged his part of the duty. He renews his charge, he enforces it by powerful arguments, and he prevails. He was but a poor subject of that king who had made Esther his queen. But the grandeur of her station did not hinder him from using all freedom in dealing with her. He was her father. She was still his daughter in her heart as much as ever. He knew her modesty, her veneration for himself, her contempt of earthly grandeur; and makes use of his influence with her to excite her to her duty. Happy are those friends who freely make use of their mutual influence for such purposes.

Esther was afraid of her life if she should go in unto the king. Mordecai shews her, that if she valued her own life, she ought to go in unto him, and to make supplication to him for her people. Her safety lay not in shunning, but in doing, a duty so needful. She might risk her life in venturing to do a thing which was prohibited by the unreasonable laws of Persia; but she must lose it by refusing to obey the commandment of God, which requires us

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to use all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

It was natural for Esther to think that her own life was in no danger from the bloody decree. Her husband had unknowingly signed a warrant for her death: But who would venture to lift up his hand against the queen? Or what would it avail her murderers to alledge the king's law, when the king himself, who was above the law, would consider the cause as his own? We must not, however, entertain such a mean opinion of Esther, as to think that she would be less zealous in the cause, because she might apprehend herself to be safe. Yet Mordecai hopes to quicken her zeal, by letting her know that she was not more safe than other Jews. God would find some means to free them from their danger; but Esther, though in the king's house, must not expect to escape if she deserted the cause of God, and of his people in their extreme danger.

Human probabilities were on her side. The king, though perhaps alienated from her, would not suffer himself to be insulted by a murder perpetrated upon his queen, and in his own palace. Even Haman himself would not dare to arm an assassin against the queen. But we are not to trust to human probabilities. God is the author, the preserver of our lives. When he withdraws his protection, we are undone; and how could Esther expect his protection, if she refused, at the loud call of his providence, and at the pressing admonition of Mordecai, to seek the life of her people? "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and them that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we know it not, doth not

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not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth," or he that observeth, "thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" Are we worthy to have our lives preserved, if we shew no concern for the lives of our fellow-men? Are we not in some measure chargeable with those deaths which we do not endeavour, if it is in our power, to prevent? Let it be remembered, that the life of the soul is infinitely more precious than that of the body, and that we have more frequent opportunities of contributing to the salvation of souls, than to the preservation of natural life; though we have more opportunities of the latter sort than we carefully improve, or perhaps think about. When we see men wasting their bodies, and shortening their days, by idleness, by intemperance, by the indulgence of those bitter passions which are as rottenness to the bones, we may contribute to the life of both soul and body, by good advice, by earnest expostulation, by our prayers to God. By our prayers, by our holy example, by well-timed and well-advised reproofs and exhortations, we may save souls from death. If we do not what God enables us to do for the salvation of perishing souls, are we not accessary to their perdition?

"Think not that because thou art in the king's house, thou shalt be safe."—It is vain to trust in kings, or in the sons of men, in whom there is no confidence. Kings die. In that day their breath goes forth, and their thoughts perish. Kings are changeable creatures, like other men. The kings were not like the laws of the Medes and Persians, which could not be altered. He that was in the morning the favourite,

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vourite, might, before the evening, be hanged by their orders. Herod, king of Judea, dearly loved his wife Mariamne, and yet he ordered her to be put to death without any crime, but what was committed in his own dark imagination. Monima was a beloved wife of Mithridates, the great king of Pontus, and yet, when he lost a battle against the Romans, that she might not fall into other hands than his own, he commanded her to die; and the only favour he shewed her, was to give her the choice of her own death. Her choice was, to strangle herself by her royal tiara, which had long been hateful to her. But even in this she was disappointed, and her last, or nearly her last words, were, 'Poor bauble! canst thou not do me even this mournful office?

Jesus forbids us to fear them that have power only to kill the body. Still less, if possible, are we to trust them; for they have no power even to save the body. God is to be trusted and feared. He is the Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy *.

VER. 13.—*For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*

What evidence had Mordecai to go upon, in alledging that deliverance and enlargement should arise from some one place or another to the Jews at this time? He had as good evidence as the word, and even the oath of God, could give him. The Lord had made a covenant with Abraham, to be a God unto himself, and to his seed after him. "This covenant he ratified by

* Psal. cxlvi. 3.—6.

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by his oath unto Isaac, and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." Haman's malice, and, what was more formidable than Haman's malice, the sins of God's people, could not make void the promise of God, nor make his oath and his covenant of none effect. We are sure, even in this age of the world, that no Haman will ever be able to extirpate the natural seed of Abraham: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

There were many prophecies published by Isaiah, by Jeremiah, by Ezekiel, by Daniel, and the other prophets, concerning the restoration of the captive Jews, concerning God's care of them in their own land, or in their dispersion, and concerning that Saviour who was to come to Zion, to turn away ungodliness from Jacob. These prophecies were doubtless well known to Mordecai. They were the life of his soul, and the joy of his heart.

The Lord had, in every age, been "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." He had given enlargement to his people when they were shut up between rocks and seas, and the sword of an enraged enemy, who was much too strong for them; and he who had delivered his people from so great deaths, had assured them that he would still deliver them: "The Lord said, I will bring again my people from the depths of the sea, and from Bashan hill."

The hearts of the unbelieving Jews would sink within them in their present perilous condition; but believers in the word of God would not be confounded. They knew that the honour of God was as deeply

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ly interested in the event, as were their life and welfare; and that he who had so often wrought for his name's sake, would still work for his people. There were many and strong enemies; but they had the Almighty God for their friend.

Mordecai was one of those believers who, in the days of Israel's distress, "remembered the years (or the changes) of the right hand of the Most High;" and in the words before us, he expressed his full assurance that God would frustrate Haman's plot. Blessed are they that trust in the Lord. God will keep them in perfect peace, and enable them in the darkest days to express their joyful hope, that "at evening-time it shall be light."

But why did Mordecai mourn so bitterly, if he was assured that deliverance would arise from some place to the Jews? "Because in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to mourning and to weeping." In such a dark day the people of God were called to pour out their hearts like water before the face of the Lord, for their life, and for the life of their children. The faith of God's people does not interfere with the exercise of affections suited to mournful dispensations of providence. Faith encourages us to come before God with tears and cryings, because it assures us that he knows all our distresses, and puts our tears into his bottle.

Enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews, to the Israel of God, under the gospel, as well as under the law. Amidst all the distresses of the church, we may rest assured that she cannot perish. Particular churches may be destroyed, but the church universal

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versal is built by Christ upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

If Jews according to the flesh were blessed with the assured hopes of deliverance to their nation in every danger, however dreadful, those who are Jews, in the noblest sense, may at all times expect help from God. "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but who is one inwardly. Neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, whose praise is not of men, but of God." If its praise be of God, he will be its almighty protector. He may sift Israel as corn is sifted in a sieve, but one grain shall not be suffered to fall upon the ground.

"If thou altogether forbear at this time, enlargement and deliverance shall rise up to the Jews from some other place."—Esther, though warmly solicited to interpose in the behalf of the Jews, must not imagine that their safety depends on her. If she succeeds, she will have reason to bless God for making her the honoured instrument of their deliverance; and the Jews will have great reason to bless her, and to bless God for her. But she will have no reason to be proud. She is assured, that whether she had any hand in their deliverance or not, their deliverance was sure. It by no means depended upon her exertions; for if she had never been born, if she had never been a queen, or if she had been a base apostate to the religion of the court, Israel was safe under the protection of the God of Israel. The safety of the church depends not on her best friends on earth; nor can her deliverance be prevented, either by the coldness of her friends, or by the power of her enemies.

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All, therefore, who perform eminent services to the church, ought humbly to thank the Lord for chusing to employ them rather than others; for he is never at a loss for servants to do his work. The life of Moses might have been thought by the Israelites so necessary for them when they were delivered from Egypt, that they could have little hope, without him, of obtaining possession of the promised land; and yet he died when they were come to the borders of it. But God could put a sufficient portion of Moses' spirit in Joshua to bring his people into the land of which he had sworn unto them; and when they were both in heaven, he could raise up other saviours to his people, to deliver them from their enemies.

"But thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed."—Why? Because Esther neglected to do what she ought to have done for the salvation of Israel. It is a common, and not a false maxim, That sins of omission are less heinous than sins of commission. But let us not mistake the maxim: The meaning of it is, That sins of omission, as such, are not so atrocious as sins of commission. On other accounts, they may be criminal above most sins that you can name. It is worse to do what God plainly forbids, than to neglect the doing of what he requires, because (when other things are equal) it is a token of a more rebellious disposition, to be active in doing what is sinful, than, through negligence and inattention, to omit a duty required from us. Yet, if you saw a man drowning in the water, and did not attempt to save him from the danger, would not your sin be no less than murder, and consequently worse than an officious lie, or even than an instance of fraud? But if Esther had neglected

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neglected to interpose in the present case, they would have suffered the whole nation to perish. If she did not, she had at least the guilt of not doing what she could to prevent it, and thus she exposed herself and her father's house to destruction from the anger of God.

But what had her father's house to do with her sin? Is it not said, that "the son shall not die for the iniquity of the father, nor the father for the iniquity of the son?" This is a law which the universal Lord has prescribed for men, and not for himself. We know that God destroyed even whole families for the sins of their heads. Only we must remember, that the whole world is guilty before God. He can, with justice, destroy a whole family when one member has sinned, and when the rest had no participation in the guilt, because guilt of another kind can be justly charged upon them. The punishment is therefore, properly speaking, the punishment of the single offender made ten-fold more heavy, by involving with him so many dear objects of his regard. His relations were chargeable with sins which exposed them to death when God pleased to require their souls; and they have no more reason to blame the righteousness of the divine procedure, than the debtor has to find fault with the creditor for demanding the money due to him, when he finds occasion to use it.

"If thou art silent at this time, thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed."—But was it the exclusive duty of Esther to take this business upon herself? Where was that law to be found which imposed a burden upon this good woman, from which all the rest of the Jews were exempted? Was there a special commandment given to her, which she could not disobey

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obey without exposing herself and all her father's house to destruction? Esther was certainly under the same laws which bound all the rest of the Jews, and under none else. There was no special precept given to her, like that which was addressed by Jesus to the young man, who was commanded to sell all that he had, and give to the poor. Yet Esther, by that common law, had a special duty enjoined on her. All were bound to use the means competent to them to preserve their nation from destruction. Petitioning the king was a means of safety necessary to be used, and the providence of God plainly pointed out Esther as the petitioner most likely to suceeed. The law of God is the only rule of our duty: but the providence of God often points out to individual persons, duties which the law requires especially from themselves. Those things may be necessary duties at one time which are not duties at another, or to one person, or one class of persons, which are not required from others; and the neglect of those duties which are required from us, and not from others, or of those duties which are rendered so only by a particular train of providences, may involve us in deep guilt, and in great danger. A man who knows a particular remedy for a certain disease, of which others are ignorant, would be chargeable with the fatal consequences that may arise from the general ignorance, if he locks up his knowledge in his own breast. If Providence furnish us with talents which are not granted to others, we must account for our use of them. If we have opportunities of doing much good which others haye not, and make no use of them, we make ourselves guilty of a crime which can be charged upon

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upon none but ourselves. The law is the same to all; but particular circumstances place us under the obligation of particular precepts, which take no hold of persons in different situations.

"And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—The circumstances which led Esther to a throne were wonderful, either in themselves, or in their combination. The daughter of Abihail the Jew was astonished to find herself the wife of the great king Ahasuerus, and doubtless must have thought, that the providence of God, which shone so wonderfully in her exaltation, had some design in view of which she was hitherto ignorant. When Joseph was raised to be lord over all the land of Egypt, God was making provision for the support of Jacob's family. When Esther was elevated to the dignity of a great queen, and when a sentence of death had gone forth against her whole nation, it appeared highly probable to Mordecai that God designed her to be the preserver of her people. It was, therefore, in his judgement, her necessary duty to make the attempt, that she might not be backward to second the designs of Providence. To hide our talent in a napkin is criminal and dangerous.

If God has done remarkable things for us, we have reason to believe that he expects some services from us suited to the situation in which he has placed us, and to the means of service with which he has furnished us. We ought, therefore, when we consider what God hath done for us, to consider at the same time what he requires from us. If our circumstances are peculiar, it is likely that some peculiar service

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are required; or if we cannot find out any particular services to be done at present, let us wait a little, and we may find calls to services suited to our condition. "The Lord hath made all things," and he still does all things, "for himself."

"What if thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—It is at least highly probable. But the duty itself is certain: and if we do not improve particular dispensations of providence for the purposes for which they are intended, we walk contrary to God, and provoke him to walk contrary to us. "Whoso is wise to observe the doings of the Lord, even he shall understand his loving-kindness." But when men do not know their times and opportunities, their misery is great upon them.

VER. 23.—*Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast likewise: and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.*

Esther highly respected Mordecai; and she respected him not the less, but the more, because he continued to use the freedom of a father with her. She doubtless thought herself blessed in a friend who took the liberty to remonstrate with her concerning duties which she felt an aversion to perform. He that rebukes and admonishes, will be far more valued by us, if we are wise, than he that flatters with his lips.

Esther never intended to decline the perilous services recommended by Mordecai, when she should find it to be a necessary duty. Being now convinced

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that it was, she promises to go in to the king, let the consequence be what it would. But, as her hope of success was in God, she requires all the Jews in Shushan to fast for her three days. The Jews in other places would have been required to give her the same help, if it had been practicable to give them seasonable information of her wishes and intentions. Paul frequently seeks the help of the prayers of the church. Esther seeks the help, not only of the prayers of the Jews, but of all the devotional exercises of a solemn fast of three days continuance. The situation of the Jews was critical and dangerous in the extreme. Esther's hopes from her influence with the king were faint. If God did not pity his people, they were undone. Never did God more loudly call for fasting than at this time; and a single day observed in fasting, was thought by her too little to be employed in the exercise. Perhaps she called in mind the example of the Ninevites, and the happy success of their devotion. They observed a strict fast of three days, and cried mightily to God, and turned from their wickedness, and the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto them, and did it not. Esther would justly think that the Lord, who shewed such favour to an Assyrian city, infamous for its former wickedness, would not turn a deaf ear to his own people in the day of their distress.

It would be folly to think that Esther placed the least dependance upon mere abstinence from food, when she required the Jews to fast. All her expectations of advantage from this fast were founded upon God, who had instituted this duty, and promised happy consequences to it, when it was observed according

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to his will. We have, therefore, no reason to say that the name of God is not to be found in this book, which speaks of his worship, (a part of his name). The name *God*, or *Lord*, is not in it. But who does not know, that the exercise of fasting here enjoined by Esther, is a part of his service, and that no advantage can be expected from it but through divine mercy accepting this service, and hearing the supplications of his people? Esther, indeed, does not speak of the prayers, of the self-examination, of the confessions, of the reformation, that were to accompany this abstinence from food. The exercises proper to a day of fasting were already known to the Jews, or they would learn them from the history of Jonah, to which the similarity of the present danger of the Jews with that of the Ninevites would lead their minds; or if they needed any further information on the subject, Esther believed that Mordecai was better qualified than herself to give them proper directions. She insists, however, upon one thing, that they should neither eat nor drink three days, day or night; but observe the fast with strictness, like persons so deeply concerned in the business, that they would deny the strongest cravings of nature, and bear the extremes of hunger and thirst, that they might express the deepest humiliation of spirit before God, and pour forth their hearts before him. There are too many amongst us who would think it an intolerable hardship to be deprived of their food for a single day, or for half of a day, when they have the loudest calls to solemn fasting. How would such persons have acted in the time of Esther's fast? Would not the remedy have appeared to them almost as bad as the

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the disease? Was it not as good to die by the sword of their enemies, as to starve themselves to death? Yet we do not find that any of the Jews in Shushan refused to comply with Esther's desire. The fear of death before their eyes, made their ordinary food a matter of indifference to them. What though they should deny themselves the ordinary comforts of life for three days, when their object was to obtain a reversal of a sentence of death given forth against them?

We are not, however, to understand the words so strictly as to make them a prohibition of all sorts of food for three days, even to those men, women, or children, whose bodies could not sustain such a long fast. Doubtless there were some among them who, through sickness or weakness, could as little bear a complete privation of food for three whole days and nights, as that Egyptian slave whom David relieved from mortal weakness, contracted by a fast of three days, when he was marching against the Amalekites that had burnt Ziklag. Esther did not think that it was any man's duty to destroy his body by a voluntary fast. She knew that God would have mercy and not sacrifice. Her desire was not to destroy, but to save the lives of her people. Her words may be reasonably understood to mean, that the Jews were not to take any regular meal, nor any other supplies of food, but such as might be necessary for the preservation of health and vigour. Perfect abstinence for three days and three nights would have been inimical, rather than favourable, to the great purposes of the fast. Paul said to the mariners that sailed with him to Rome, "This day is the fourteenth day that

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have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing." Surely they did not want food during two complete weeks; yet they are said to have continued fasting, and taking nothing, because, amidst the agitation of fear and hope, they were incapable of taking any regular meal.

"Fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days."—They were not called with Esther to go in unto the king. A service attended with no danger was required from them. But what they can do, and are called to do, they must do as conscientiously as Esther. There are many great works which are beyond our strength, or out of the line of our calling; and yet we may and ought to take a part in them, by strengthening the hands of those who are called to undertake them. Paul had many helpers in his work of the gospel, even among those who could not, or to whom it would not have been allowed, to speak in the church. We all ought to be fellow-helpers to the truth. When many go abroad to spread the gospel amongst heathens, we find it our duty to continue in the land of our nativity; but, without removing from it, we may promote the work in which they are employed, by our contributions, or at least by our prayers.

There are some who beg the prayers of others, and yet pray little for themselves. Esther, who requested the Jews to fast for her, told them that she also would fast, and would abstain as strictly from food as she desired them to do. She had been accustomed to a well-furnished table; but she was not thereby disqualified from afflicting her soul by fasting when she saw it to be her duty. She no doubt observed the annual fasts prescribed to the Jews, and she determined

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termined to observe this extraordinary fast which she herself prescribed. She hoped to obtain mercy from the Lord, that she might escape death by the laws of Persia, and might be the instrument of the salvation of her people. But if she miscarried, her fasting and prayer would be proper acts of preparation for her latter end.

"I and my maids will fast."—Some, it is probable, of Esther's maids, were heathens when they came into her service *. Yet we find her promising that they would fast. She can answer for them, as Joshua for his household, that they would serve the Lord. If mistresses were as zealous as queen Esther for the honour of God, and the conversion of sinners, they would bestow pains upon the instruction and religious improvement of their female servants. If women may gain to Christ their own husbands by their good conversation, may they not also gain the souls of their servants? and if they are gained to Christ, they are gained to themselves also. Esther expected much benefit from the devotional exercises of her maidens. Paul expected much from the prayers of his converts. Those whom we convert from the error of their ways, will probably be our joy and helpers upon earth; they will certainly be our joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of Christ.

"I and my maids will fast."—Esther could not join in the public prayers of the Jews, when they met together out of many families, to strive together in their prayers to God. But she will fast at home, not only by herself, but with her maidens. There are public fasts in which all are expected to join. There

* Chap. iii.

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ought likewise to be secret and family fasts observed by us, according to the calls of providence, and the situation of our affairs, or the condition of our souls*.

"And then will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law."—She would not go in unto the king, till she had made her supplication to the Lord, and till the Jews had given her the assistance of their prayers. She was sensible, that though "all men will intreat the ruler's favour, every man's judgement comes from the Lord;" and that the hearts of kings are turned by him according to his pleasure. What, therefore, she desires in the first place is, that she may obtain comfortable assurance of the divine favour. If the Lord be on her side, she is safe. If the Lord favour her suit, she need not fear the coldness of Ahasuerus, or the mortal enmity of Haman. "The floods may rage. They may lift up their voices and make a mighty noise: but the Lord on high is mightier than the waves of the sea, or the voice of their roaring."

But when the fast is over, she will go in unto the king. She will not think that her duty is done, when she has prayed and fasted. She will seek, by the use of proper means, to obtain that blessing which she has been asking. The insincerity of our prayers is too often discovered by our sloth and cowardice. We ask blessings from God, and, as if he were bound to confer them, not according to his own will, but according to ours, we take no care to use those means which he hath appointed for obtaining them, or we do not use them with requisite diligence. Esther will go

* Matth. vii.

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go in unto the king, although she could not go in without violating the laws, and risking her life.

"I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law."—Who will keep the king's laws, if the queen herself does not observe them? Did not Esther know that Vashti lost her crown, and her husband, for disobeying the king in a matter of less consequence than a standing law deliberately enacted by the king's authority? True; but necessity has no law. She will keep the king's laws as far as she can keep them and the laws of God at the same time. But in the present case, she must be a betrayer of her country, of her own life, of the laws of Heaven, if she hesitate any longer to go in unto the king, although it be not according to the law. We must obey princes, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." But, for conscience sake, we must stop short where the law of God interposes *.

Esther may lose her royal dignity. She may be expelled from the king's bed. She may lose her life for disobeying the laws. But "if I perish," she says, "I perish." It is not necessary for me to live, but it is necessary for me to do my duty. If I perish in obeying the will of God, it is better than to live in disobedience.

"If I perish, I perish."—Our lives are not our own; they cannot be long preserved by us. They will be of little value to us without a good conscience. That life which is purchased by neglect of duty, is shameful, bitter, worse than death. Whoever shall save his life in this manner, shall lose it in this world, as well as in the next. His life will be but a lingering death:

* Acts, iv. 19.

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for the dissatisfaction and painful reflections which fill it up, are far less tolerable than the bodily pain which usually precedes death. But to lose life for the sake of Christ and a good conscience, is truly to live. A day of life employed in the most hazardous duties, by which we shew that our love to God is stronger than death, excels a thousand days of a life spent in the service and enjoyment of the world.

VER. 17.—*So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.*

Mordecai commanded Esther, and she obeyed him. Esther commanded Mordecai, and he obeyed her. They served one another in love. It would be happy for us if we knew how to command and how to obey in our turns, being subject one to another in the fear of God.

Mordecai required the Jews to fast three days according to Esther's orders; and we have no reason to doubt of their ready and grateful compliance. They would not think it hard, but necessary and useful, to be called to afflict their souls to an extraordinary degree, when their lives and the lives of all their people were in question. And yet the present life of all the many thousands of Judah was not of equal importance to the eternal life of one precious soul. What, then, are we to think of ourselves, if the sentence of eternal death denounced against every sinner, has never induced us to devote as many hours to fervent prayer, as these Jews employed days in prayer and fasting to obtain deliverance from temporal death? Is it not to be feared, that we do not really believe what the scripture tells us about that judgement which is come upon all men to condemnation, if we think it too much trouble

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trouble to spend some hours or days in considering our condition, and pouring out supplications for that mercy which we so greatly need? The Jews fasted. Esther went in to the king, uncertain about the event, but pressed by hard necessity. Necessity is laid upon sinners, yea, woe unto them if they do not obtain mercy! But great encouragement is given them to come to the throne of grace to obtain mercy. God himself puts words in their mouths, and will he not hear those prayers which are dictated by his own Spirit? Hos. xiv. 2. 8. Jer. xxxi. 18. 19. 20.

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DISCOURSE IX.

ESTHER GOES IN UNTO THE KING, AND FINDS FAVOUR IN HIS EYES.—HAMAN, INFLAMED BY REVENGE, PREPARES A GALLOWS FOR MORDECAI OF FIFTY CUBITS HIGH.—CHAP. v.

VER. 1.—*Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house; and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.*

ESTHER was not one of those who resolve and promise well, but do not perform. How ready are we, like the disobedient son in the parable, to say, We will go and work in the vineyard, and after all go not! But what excuse will we have for breaking our promises through the mere power of laziness, when Esther kept her word at the risk of her life? She deserves to be ranked with the noble army of confessors, if not of martyrs. She went in unto the king, when a law faced

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faced her which declared it to be death for any subject, not excepting the queen, to go in unto the king's private apartments without his leave.

Nor did she linger in doubt whether she should go in unto the king or not. If she had, new temptations, dangerous to her virtue, might have assaulted her. Her resolution had been already formed, and she makes haste, and delays not to do the commandment of Mordecai, which she considers as a commandment from God. On the third day, she went in unto the king. Her fast did not, it seems, consist of three complete days and nights. In the language of the Jews, "three days and three nights" might mean one whole day and a part of two others. Jesus is said to have been "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," and yet he is said to have risen "on the third day."

She observed her fast, and it was no sooner over than she went in unto the king. It was wise in her, when she had finished her supplications, to present her petition to the king. When Hannah prayed in the bitterness of her grief, her heart was eased; she was no more sorrowful. We have reason to think that Esther's anxieties, too, were banished by her devotion. She had been lifting up her soul to the Lord. She had been, doubtless, remembering her song in the night, and the wonderful works of former times would inspire her with the hope of an happy event to her present enterprise. Thus she was able to approach unto the king with all that composure of mind, and chearfulness of countenance, which were necessary for the occasion.

She put on her royal apparel when she went in

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the king. She cared not for the distinction of her rank, and placed not her delight in the outward adorning of gold and pearls, and costly array. But t was necessary to lay aside her mourning apparel, and to put on her beautiful garments, when she went in to the king. Good wives will endeavour to please their husbands by a decency in dress, as well as other things that may appear little when they are not considered as means to gain an important end. The married woman careth, and ought to care, how she may please her husband; and those women do not act as becometh saints, whose dress, or any part of their behaviour, naturally tends to produce disgust. Esther had a peculiar reason for dressing herself with her beautiful garments, when she went into the king's presence. But all women are bound to please their husbands in things lawful and innocent, because the law of Christ binds them to reverence their husbands: and their husbands, if they are not fools, will not desire them to transgress the laws concerning dress, which two apostles have thought it necessary to record for their direction *.

"She stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house," *i. e.* over against the king's private apartment in the palace. The word rendered *house*, may signify either a large pile of building, or particular apartments in it. In the first of these senses it is to be understood when it is said, "she stood in the inner court of the king's house" or palace. In the second, when it is said that she stood "over against the king's house." She stood within his view as he sat upon his royal throne, waiting for the intimation

* 1 Tim. ii. 1 Pet. iii.

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mation of his will, either to leave her to the penalty of the laws, or to save her alive. We have already seen that Esther was a courageous woman. She would venture her life for the salvation of her people. It is probable, however, that she felt great agitation of spirit in this critical moment, when the sentence of life or death was in effect to be pronounced upon her. Her busy imagination would call up her fears, by setting in her view the cruel law, the coldness of the king, the severity exercised upon Vashti. But, in the multitude of her thoughts within her, it is to be presumed, that God's comforts delighted her soul.

VER. 2.—*And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.*

The countenance of Esther at this critical moment was highly interesting to the king her husband. Grief, anxiety, and pity, painted in her beauteous face, awakened his pity, and attracted his love. She found favour in his eyes, and he held out to her the golden sceptre, the sign of grace and pardon, which Esther touched, in thankful acceptance of the offered mercy.

"As a prince," said God to Jacob, "hast thou power with God; and with men also shalt thou prevail." Esther had been weeping and making supplication, like her father Jacob, and had prevailed, and saw the face of the king as if it had been the face of God, and her life was preserved; and, what was still better, she had the happy presage of the preservation of the life of all her people, in that fa[illegible]

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which was extended to herself. What wonderful favours from men may fervent supplication to God obtain! "If he be for us, who can be against us?"

VER. 3.—*Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be even given thee, to the half of the kingdom.*

The heart of the king, if it was formerly alienated from Esther, was now most effectually turned to favour her. He not only held out to her the golden sceptre, but addressed her with expressions of the tenderest love, and of the richest bounty. She may now confidently seek from him the life of all her people; for she was assured that she should receive the richest boon which discretion could suffer her to ask.

Our Lord teaches us to draw a comfortable instruction from the bounty of parents to their children: "If even ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" May we not with equal assurance draw the same instruction from the kindness of Ahasuerus to his queen? A man who could wantonly devote a whole nation to destruction, and a nation to which his queen belonged, for aught he knew, will nevertheless give her what she pleases to ask, when she comes to him as a humble petitioner, although her coming to him was not according to the law. When we come to the throne of the eternal King, we have the law of grace on our side. Come boldly unto the throne of grace. Ask, and ye shall receive. The King whom we approach is rich in mercy to all that call upon him. He will not with-hold from us the desire of our lips. He

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He will do for us above what we can ask or think. We have perhaps come into his presence under discouraging apprehensions of his displeasure, but he will not contend for ever, neither will he be always wroth. "He hath heard the desire of the humble. Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear."

VER. 4.—*And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.*

Esther had surely a good opportunity to present her request to the king, when he was so well disposed to grant it. But the importance of it was far more than life. Her timidity was not entirely removed by all the kind words which the king had spoken. He might take it kindly to find a rich banquet prepared for him by Esther. She hoped that his heart would be warmed with friendship, and inspired with generous and pleasing sentiments, by a banquet to his taste, and she wished for some more time of recollection, preparation, and prayer, before she made known her great request to the king. All, therefore, that she requests at present is, that the king and Haman might come to the feast which she had prepared for their entertainment.

A feast is, especially in the eastern countries, a seal of friendship; and, therefore, it may appear strange that Haman was invited along with the king, although Esther had it in view to present a petition to the king against him. But necessity was laid upon her, if she invited the king, to invite Haman also, who was as inseparable from him at this time as his right hand. The fault was in the king, and not in Esther,

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if any wrong was done him by cherishing those proud imaginations that were soon to be humbled to the dust. She was not in a situation to act with the delicacy of Saladin, sultan of Egypt, who gave a draught of refreshing liquor to his thirsty captive, Guy, king of Jerusalem; but when the king handed the cup to his companion in bonds, Arnold, lord of Brescia, the sultan desired him to observe, that it was not he, but the king of Jerusalem, that gave him the cup. The reason of this behaviour was, that Saladin had justly doomed Arnold to death for barbarities treacherously perpetrated by him against his people. No man, however, can say that Esther dealt unfairly with Haman. His presence was expedient at the presenting of the petition, that there might be no pretence to complain of injury. He was to be charged with the worst of crimes, and there was nothing unfair in giving him an opportunity, by being present, to exculpate himself, if that had been possible.

VER. 5.—*Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.*

The king was not displeased at the timidity of Esther, but considered it as a mark of the profound reverence which she entertained for him. He was pleased with the respect shewed to him in inviting him, with his friend Haman, to a banquet. He knew that Haman would reckon himself highly honoured by the invitation, and sent for him to come in all haste to share in the entertainment. Thus far things went well with Esther. She was assured of the king's kindness, and furnished with an opportunity

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nity of ingratiating herself still more with the man to whom, under God, she must look for the life of her people.

VER. 6.—*And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.*

We find, in the second chapter, that the beauty and modesty of Esther gained the hearts of all who saw her. Doubtless, when the king, at the banquet of wine, had an opportunity of conversing with Esther, and of observing those lovely graces that appeared in every part of her behaviour, his love was inflamed, and he thought he could not give her too great proofs of his kindness. The pleasure he enjoyed in the entertainment, and in the society of those whom he most loved, opened his heart to liberality; and he again desires Esther to present her request before him, with the repeated assurance that it should be granted her to the half of the kingdom. The fears of Esther, however, seem not yet to have been altogether extinguished, although hope predominated.

VER. 7. 8.—*Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is, if I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said.*

It was a great favour that she had already received, that the king honoured her banquet with his presence, and all that she will venture to ask more at this time is, that this favour may be repeated. But the great object of her desire for which she entered into the

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king's presence, she dares not yet to produce. She lays herself, however, under an obligation to vanquish her fears, and to acquaint the king with her wishes, if he will favour her with his presence to-morrow. The king would not take it amiss that Esther discovered such timidity in his presence. He loved her, and wished to be loved by her; but he wished likewise to be feared with a reverence greater perhaps than is due to mortals.

But, could Esther have a better opportunity than the present to present her chief request to the king? She could not, perhaps, prudently publish it in the king's apartments, where some of the princes might be present, who would be ready to declaim against the request, as a petition for the overthrow of the fundamental laws of the empire. Here none but the king and Haman were to be present, and Haman must be her enemy whenever the petition is presented. The king was now in the best humour imaginable, and nothing but courage in Esther seemed to be wanting to complete the business.

It is to be considered, however, that there was no occasion for great haste in the business, because more than ten months still remained of the time set for the destruction of the Jews; and if the queen had gained much this day upon the king's affection, she might gain still more by the entertainment and converse of the next. It is to be remembered, that there were difficulties almost insurmountable in the way of granting her request. It might seem to demand the overthrow of a fundamental law of the kingdom, that laws ratified by the king's authority, and sealed with his seal, should not be altered. It might even have been supposed,

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supposed, that the king's right to the throne was exposed to question, if he should attempt unconstitutional innovations in the government, by granting such a petition. We all know that a race of our own kings forfeited the throne by such attempts.

The king's kindness to Esther was a great encouragement to her to present her request. But his attachment to Haman might well render it doubtful whether that favourite or the queen would prevail. It is not, therefore, strange that Esther desired another day before she presented her request. She trusted in God, but she must likewise use the utmost prudence. Paul believed God that he should be saved from the hands of the Jews, to testify concerning Christ at Rome*; and yet he made application to the chief captain to protect him from their snares. The use of the best means for obtaining what we desire ought to accompany our hope in God.

It is good always to avoid undue delays in doing what is right; yet precipitancy is likewise to be avoided. We know not what a day may bring forth, when we wait for a proper season. Esther seems plainly to have been directed by the Divine Providence in deferring her petition to the following day. Very unexpected events fell out in the interval, which greatly favoured her request.

VER. 9.—*Then went Haman forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.*

Unhappy are they whose chief happiness lies in the favour of princes, or in any earthly object. Haman thought

* Acts, xxiii. 11.

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thought himself happy in the king's favour, which he enjoyed. He thought himself happy in the queen's favour, which he did not enjoy. He was soon to know that he was equally deceived in both. The queen was already plotting his destruction, and the king's favour was soon to be converted into deadly hatred.

Vain are the joys of them that have their portion in this life. Double vanity is in the joys of the proud. They are exposed to misery no less by their own capricious fancies, than by the changeable nature of external objects. Although Haman had been able to secure the king's favour to the end of his life, although he had been no less the favourite of Esther than of Ahasuerus, what good would all have done him, when such a trifle as the stiffness of Mordecai's knees could make him unhappy? He must every day have met with something to deprive him of the possession of his own soul. A man who cannot be happy unless every person give him all the respect which he may think his due, will never be happy till the Almighty resign to him the government of the world.

Mordecai was as far as ever from bowing the knee to Haman. He acted on a principle of conscience, and no circumstances could alter the settled purpose of his soul. Haman can procure a sentence of death against him, and against his people; but he cannot turn sin into duty: and let death or life come, it was Mordecai's resolution to be found in that good path which leads to life and peace.—"Haman was full of indignation against Mordecai;"

VER. 10.—*Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and*

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and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.

When proud men are seeking glory from others, they are often secretly ashamed of themselves. Haman was ashamed to disclose that secret rage which boiled in his bosom, when Mordecai bowed not his knees to him. He had indeed good reason to be ashamed, that a man so great, and blessed with such affluence of worldly comforts, should be a slave to his own vanity, and dependent on every man he saw for his happiness. What man is more to be pitied than he who cannot enjoy any comfort without the consent of all his neighbours, without excepting those whom most of all others he hates and despises? Such is the proud man. He despises all around him, and yet cannot taste of happiness if any of them think fit to deny him that homage which he wishes to enjoy. Let him hear the praises or the flatteries of nine hundred of his neighbours, his heart may be swelled with joy; but that joy is dependent for its continuance upon the next man he meets. The meanness of such a man's spirit must cover him with shame, when it is disclosed. Haman would not disclose his chagrin in the presence of Mordecai, but he could not conceal it from his friends. "When he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife."

VER. 11. 12.—*And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said, moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she*

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had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king.

Haman gives his friends an inventory of his happiness. He was immensely rich. He had many children to preserve his fame in the world. He was the unrivalled favourite of the king; and he was no less so of the queen, who honoured him almost as much as the king did. Amongst all the king's noble princes, none was admitted to the queen's royal banquet with the king but himself. Not one of the brothers or cousins of the king, not a relation of the queen, was called to the feast. Haman must therefore be considered as the second man of the kingdom.

Riches are good. The favour of kings and of queens may be very useful, and give great pleasure. But, unhappy is the man whose chief happiness lies in any of these things, or in all of them together. Riches soon make to themselves wings, and fly away; and during the time of their continuance, they cannot ease the body afflicted with the slightest disorder; far less can they produce that tranquillity of soul, without which men must be miserable were they in paradise itself. Children are no less mortal than their parents, and their life is often more grievous than their death would be. Princes may shower down favours upon us, and their smiles may gratify our vanity. But they may smile to-day, and frown to-morrow. To-day they may invite us to their banquets, and, if they are absolute princes, may to-morrow pronounce the sentence of our death. Besides, we know not the hearts of princes, and we may deceive ourselves with fond opinions of their friendship, which a short time will discover to have been illusions of our own imagination.

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nation. Haman's fate ought to be a lesson to those who boast themselves because they are become exceeding rich, and because they are blessed with every thing that the heart of a man of the world can wish. We know not what a day may bring forth. On the morrow after Haman boasted to his wife and friends of his unequalled prosperity, his honour was laid lower than the dust. His great friends appeared to be his deadly enemies. His wealth became the property of one of the nation which he had devoted to destruction. His ten children were left unprotected, to feel the dismal effects of their father's crimes. How well-founded is the precept of the apostle! "Let them that have wives (or any relation) be as though they had them not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

VER. 13.—*Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

Haman himself confesses the vanity of his high-swelling words. Why does he talk of his riches, of his children, of the favour of the king and queen, of the grandeur of his condition? That his friends might congratulate him as the happiest man in the king's dominions. Yet with the same breath he declares himself unhappy. He confesses, that all that confluence of blessings which swelled him with pride, were not blessings to him, because a certain man whom he despised did not bow the knee to him.

There are few who will confess so plainly as Haman the weakness of their own spirit. Men are ashamed to say that trifles disturb their minds, and

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prive them of self-enjoyment. But it is certain, that numbers, like Haman, are miserable amidst the means of happiness, because they want a disposition for enjoying happiness. They are so unreasonable, that a thousand enjoyments lose all their relish, for the want of something else which they cannot obtain. "A good man is satisfied from himself;" and he that is not satisfied from himself, will not be satisfied from any thing without him. He is like a sick man surrounded with the richest dainties. He cannot relish them. He starves in the midst of plenty.

Give a whole world of pleasure to a man who loves the world, and the things of it, he will soon find that something is wanted, though perhaps he does not know, so well as Haman thought he did, what it is. He finds some gall and wormwood that spread poison over his pleasures. All his abundance cannot compensate for the loss of some one thing or other that he deems essential to his happiness. The fact is, that the world cannot give a right constitution to his disordered soul, or be a substitute for that divine favour in which lies the life of our souls. Habakkuk, Paul, and other good men, could be happy in the want of every earthly enjoyment; nor could all the miseries which are the objects of aversion to the generality of mankind greatly disturb their tranquillity *; for God was the portion of their inheritance, and in him they had what a thousand worlds could not give. But those who know not God, and his Son Jesus Christ, in whom are the light and the life of men, know not the way of peace. Whatever they have, they

* Hab. iii. 17. 18. 2 Cor. ii. 14.

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they want the one thing needful, without which all things else are vanity and vexation of spirit.

"I have all things, and abound," said an apostle, who was often in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and who, at the time when he wrote these words, was a poor prisoner, that had newly received a temporary supply from his friends. This man had nothing, and yet possessed all things. Ten thousand talents were but a small part of Haman's wealth, and yet he is miserably poor, for all that he had could avail him nothing. The believer in Christ must be rich in the midst of poverty; for he is possessed of gold tried in the fire. The man who knows not Christ, is poor though he be rich, because he is utterly destitute of the true riches.

VER. 14.—*Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.*

Miserable comforters were all those friends of Haman. They were all physicians of no value. What though Mordecai had been hanged, and, to make his ignominious end the more conspicuous, upon a gallows of fifty cubits high? Haman's disease lay deep in his heart. A day would not have passed till some other vexation would have disquieted him. He would have rejoiced for a moment at Mordecai's downfall; but the joys of murder cannot be pure. The bitterness of hatred, and the reflections of conscience, must have polluted and embittered his pleasure. His pride would have [illegible]sed

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sed up other Mordecais. Some through inadvertency, others through envy, would soon have disquieted his soul with new instances of disrespect, which to him would have been insufferable insults: Or, if fear had constrained every man in the Persian dominions to give him all the honour he desired, yet it was not to be hoped, that it would be rain and sunshine at his pleasure; that dogs, and horses, and bulls, would always regulate their motions by his humour. He was not less proud than Xerxes, the father of his lord Ahasuerus, who exercised his impotent vengeance upon the winds and the seas, when they took the liberty to break down his bridge over the Hellespont.

If a proud man make his complaint to you of his unhappiness, you but make him more unhappy, if you advise him to gratify his pride by unreasonable and sinful means. You might as well advise a man dying of a dropsy to pour into his throat large quantities of water. Advise him to mortify his pride, and to learn of him who was meek and lowly in heart; to deny himself, to prepare himself for bearing the cross, to take upon himself the yoke of Christ, which is easy. The humble man is always happy. The proud man never can be happy till he is effectually humbled. It is not consistent with the nature of things, nor with the will of the high and lofty One, who abhors the proud, that the gratifications which pride requires should ever give pure or lasting pleasure to the soul.

Haman was pleased with the advice of his friends, and began to put it in execution. But he found too soon, that "he who flattereth a man spreadeth a net

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for his feet." Haman prepared for Mordecai in intention, but for himself in reality, a gallows of fifty cubits high. Remember and believe the instruction of the wise man, "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

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DISCOURSE X.

HAMAN IS COMPELLED TO CONFER A SINGULAR HONOUR UPON MORDECAI, WHICH HE HOPED TO PROCURE FOR HIMSELF.—CHAP. vi.

VER. 1.—*On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.*

THE king could not sleep, any more than we, when he pleased. Of what use, some will say, is royal dignity, if it cannot procure sleep to the wearied eyelids? A king, by the wise administration of government, may procure sleep to his people; on the contrary, by his oppression, he may cause many wearisome nights to his subjects, in which their sorrows will not suffer them to sleep. But the regal dignity will not insure sleep to him who enjoys it. It is more likely to debar his eyes from rest by those anxious cares which attend it, or by those uneasy reflections which attend the abuse of power. Labour, and a good conscience,

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conscience, will procure sweeter sleep than all the riches in the world.

" On that night could not the king sleep."—On what night? The night preceding the decisive day on which Esther was to present her petition, and the morning on which Haman had a petition of an opposite kind to be presented to the king. Observe how divine providence kept sleep from the eyes of Ahasuerus, to serve its own gracious purposes. It is said that " God giveth his beloved sleep."—But he sometimes, too, with-holds sleep from them for good purposes; and he sometimes hath with-held sleep from other persons, or disturbed it with strange dreams, for their benefit. A dream was sent to Pharaoh, that Joseph might be delivered from his prison, and exalted to power. Another dream was sent to Nebuchadnezzar, to procure the exaltation of Daniel and his friends. Ahasuerus was kept from sleep, that he might not suffer Mordecai to be hanged.

It is of great use to know how to improve those moments of the night in which we are debarred from sleep. Ahasuerus, it seems, thought he could not employ his waking moments better than by hearing the chronicles of his reign. Here, too, we may observe the superintending care of Providence. Why did not a prince, who delighted in pleasure, rather call for the melody of the harp and viol, than for the chronicles of his reign? It was the will of God that he should be put in mind of what Mordecai had done for him, because now the fit time was come that he should receive the reward of his fidelity.

VER. 2.—*And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's cham-*

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berlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

How came this part of the records to be read at this time, rather than the celebrated exploits of Cyrus, or some other passage which might be expected best to entertain the wearied king? Such was the appointment of Providence, which regulates the minutest events. "The footsteps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" in wisdom and love; and the footsteps of other men are ordered by him in wisdom and love to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose.

Mordecai might think that he had good reason to complain of the disregard shewed to his eminent services. The king was a liberal rewarder of others who had done little, but seemed to have forgotten the man who had done much in his service, the man to whom, under God, he owed himself. Yet Mordecai had this to comfort him, that his name and his services were recorded in the book of the chronicles, and therefore were not likely to be always forgotten. May not all God's faithful servants, when they think he hath forgotten them, comfort themselves with the assurance, that a book of remembrance is written before God, in which not a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in the name of a disciple, is omitted; and that infinite wisdom will chuse out the time of their reward?

VER. 3.—*And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.*

The king did not doubt but some honour and dignity

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nity had been conferred upon Mordecai for saving his life. He could not believe that he had been so thoughtlessly ungrateful, as never to require for such a length of time a service so eminent as that which Mordecai had performed; and was astonished to hear his servants say that nothing had been done for him.

Let us take a review of our lives, and consider what we have done, or not done. If our memories are good, we shall be surprised at many instances of our conduct, or of our forgetfulness. Have we shewed all that sense of gratitude to our benefactors, to which we must acknowledge them to be entitled? Have we not often intended to do what we have never done, although we must blush at the thought that we have not done it? And can we forget, that amongst our benefactors are to be reckoned our parents, and, most of all, God our Maker?

We are taught likewise by this question of Ahasuerus, not to impute to intention what may be the effect merely of inadvertence. We are apt to make louder complaints than we have any reason to make of the ingratitude of those to whom we have performed good offices. Perhaps they have forgotten that they did not requite them. Perhaps their neglects have not originated in depravity of heart, or insensibility to benefits, but in thoughtlessness, or it was occasioned by the many avocations of other affairs. We cannot indeed justify those who do not with the first opportunity requite benefits received; but we must not aggravate real evils. Who will say that David did not retain a grateful remembrance of what Jonathan had done for him? And yet several years seem to have elapsed, after he was advanced to the regal dig-

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before he inquired who were left of the house of Saul, that he might shew them the kindness of God for Jonathan's sake; and several more years passed away, before he brought the bones of that beloved friend from Jabesh-Gilead, to be interred in the sepulchre of his father.

"There is nothing done for him," said the servants of Ahasuerus. This was a disagreeable truth, which they could not conceal from the king. But the evil was not irreparable. Mordecai was still alive, and the king could yet testify his sense of the benefit received.

VER. 4.—*And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.*

"Woe to them that devise evil upon their bed," or before they go to bed, "and when the morning is light, practise it." Haman rose up early in the morning to obtain the accomplishment of his malicious designs against Mordecai. It is much to be lamented, that the children of the wicked one are often more active in the prosecution of their corrupt intentions, than the children of light in the accomplishment of their pious and charitable designs.

"Who is in the court?" said the king. He slept not for the whole night; and he heard, at the fittest time for God's purpose in keeping him awake, that Haman was in the court of the palace. When he was newly informed that Mordecai had never been rewarded for saving his life, he asked the question, "Who is in the court?"

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VER. 5.—*And the king's servant said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.*

When the king had formed the resolution that Mordecai should be immediately rewarded with the highest honours, he was glad that Haman had come so opportunely to give him his advice what honours were fittest to be conferred on him.

VER. 6.—*So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the kin delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?*

Long as Mordecai had been overlooked, the king discovers a warm gratitude for his good service when it is called to remembrance. This teaches us one happy means of exciting gratitude in our heart to our benefactors. Let us call to remembrance their benefits, and we must be more brutish than oxen or asses, if we feel not grateful impressions on our hearts. It was by this method that David awakened his soul to the praises of God for all his benefits.

You may likewise be of great use to your neighbours, by reminding them, when it appears necessary, of the benefits which they have received, either from their fellow-men, or from their Maker. You see in this part of the history of Ahasuerus, what happy effects a word read or spoken may have.

The king delighted to honour the man who had saved his life. What honour is due to our parents who have given us life? To those who have been instrumental in saving us from eternal wrath? Above all, to Him who gave himself for us, that we might be

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be preserved from everlasting destruction? 1 Cor vi. 19. 20. 2 Cor. v. 14. 15.

"Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom should the king delight to do honour more than to myself?" —This proud conceit of Haman did not seem to be without ground. If the king had not wanted his sleep the foregoing night, it would have been well founded. How uncertain is the favour of men! and how much are those to be pitied, who mistake the rolling wave for a solid rock, on which they may build the foundation of their happiness!

VER. 7.—*And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown-royal which is set upon his head; and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.*

Haman thought with himself that he was certainly the man whom the king delighted to honour; but he did not say so. The vainest of the sons of men affect modesty, to obtain gratification to their vanity. If the king had asked Haman what honour he wished for himself, he would not have asked what he now supposed he was asking for himself, without incurring the danger into which Adonijah brought himself by asking the concubine of David to wife. The kings of the East were jealous of all that affected, or seemed to affect any badge of royalty. Alexander the Great, when he was sailing upon the river Euphrates, and

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suffered the diadem to drop from his head into the waters, punished with death a seaman who brought it out of the river upon his head.

But it was not professedly for himself. It was for the man, unknown to him, whom the king desired to honour, that Haman asked the glory, not hitherto allowed to any subject, of wearing for once the royal apparel, and of riding through the city on the favourite horse of the king, adorned with a royal coronet, under the care of one of the king's most noble princes, who was on that day to be the servant of the man whom the king delighted to honour. We see in what Haman placed the chief happiness of man. He could not hope to obtain the admired dignity of sitting upon the royal throne; but the happiness next to that, in his estimation, was to be adorned for once with some of the ensigns of royalty, to be served by the greatest of the king's princes during the exhibition of his royal pomp, and to be declared the favourite of the king. What an empty, what a transient shadow of felicity was this! Surely the man who sought it from the king was a child in understanding; and yet such children are the greatest part of mankind. What is there more solid or satisfactory in any of the objects of human pursuit, whilst men are unilluminated from above? "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" But we can see and despise the folly of other men walking in a vain shew, when we ourselves walk in a shew equally vain. "Surely every man is vanity!"

VER. 10.—*Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel, and the horse, as thou hast said, and*

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do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.

This is a great infelicity which attends worldly pursuits, that there is no proportion between the pleasure of success and the pain of disappointment. How unsatisfactory to Haman would the wearing of royal ornaments for a small part of a day have been, and all the other honours which he expected to enjoy only for a few moments! We can scarcely suppose that the pleasure of this feast to his vanity would have lasted longer than a night, or a week. But how dreadful a stroke was given to him, by hearing that the man whom he mortally hated was the man whom the king delighted to honour; that he was to be invested with that royal pomp to which Haman himself looked as the perfection of felicity, and that he must become the servant of that man for whom he had erected a gallows fifty cubits high! What exquisite misery, if he had lived to endure it, must have been his portion, at the galling remembrance of his own disgrace, when the erection of the lofty gibbet published to the whole city the height of his hopes, and the bitterness of his disappointment!

"Let nothing fail," said the king, "of all that thou hast spoken."—He counted no honours too great for his benefactor. He would compensate by his liberality the time which Mordecai had lived unrewarded, and unhonoured. If we have neglected to do good when we should have done it, let us use double diligence in doing it, if time is still left us to repair our omissions.

VER. 11.—*Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback*

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back through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

Do you complain that you must deny yourselves, and take up your cross in following Christ? But who is the man that is exempted from trouble, or the man that does not find it necessary to deny himself on many occasions? And is it not better to deny ourselves for Christ, than to deny ourselves for the sake of any earthly object? You see that Haman, great as he was in the court of Ahasuerus, must serve Mordecai as his lacquey, and perform to him those services which to Haman himself appeared the most glorious of all others, when he would have given thousands of gold and silver for a warrant to slay him. The greatest earthly princes must often do things displeasing, or omit things pleasing to themselves, for temporary advantage, or even without the prospect of advantage. What could Haman gain from Mordecai, or from Ahasuerus, for doing what he could not do without the most extreme reluctance? But the least instance of self-denial for the sake of Christ shall be attended with a great reward, worthy of the bounty of the Giver.

Mordecai was too wise to value those childish honours which appeared so glorious to Haman. He was, undoubtedly, struck with amazement when Haman brought to him the royal robes, and the royal horse. But it was necessary for him to yield obedience to the king's pleasure; and doubtless he saw the gracious hand of God in what was done to him. Mordecai had more sagacity than the friends of Haman, who saw his fall before Mordecai the Jew,

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presaged by this instance of his humiliation. Jacob saw the love of God in the face of his reconciled enemy. Mordecai saw the favour of God in the reluctant services performed by an enemy as full of malice as ever, and was cheered by the dawnings of that deliverance to his nation for which he had been praying and looking.

VER. 12.—*And Mordecai came again to the king's gate; but Haman hasted to his house, mourning, and having his head covered.*

If you desire to be happy, be clothed with humility, and mortify pride. Haman in prosperity was miserable, and in adversity was doubly miserable, because he was the slave of pride. Mordecai preserved the even tenor of his soul in prosperity and in adversity. When he was led in royal state through the city, and publicly proclaimed the king's favourite, he was the same man as before, and returned without noise to the duties of his humble station. Haman's disappointment crushed his spirits. He hastened to his house, to pour out his sorrows to his friends, who could give him no comfort. He came back with his face covered, in token of that anguish which preyed upon his heart, and that shame which would not suffer him to shew his face. Yesterday he went out from the king's presence merry and joyful of heart. To-day he goes to his house pierced with incurable grief. For since Adam was upon the earth, "the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment *."

VER. 13.—*And Haman told Zeresh his wife, and all his friends, every thing that had befallen him.*—

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* Job. xx.

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He would have acted as wisely, if he had left his sorrows concealed in his own bosom; but this was impracticable. They were too violent to be concealed. He probably expected some mitigation to his griefs from the kindness of his friends. But miserable comforters were they all! Their words were the piercings of a sword.

Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.

Who were these wise men? Either sages whom Haman patronised, and from whom he expected wise counsel when he required it, or diviners, who were believed to know more than men could know, without some communication with superior beings. Many of the heathens put much confidence in diviners, but we have learned better things from the word of God. By making it our counsellor at all times of perplexity, we shall find peace to our souls *.

"If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall."—If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews. Why do they lay so much stress upon the stock from which Mordecai sprung? If Mordecai had been a native Persian, or a Babylonian, or an Egyptian, would they not have prognosticated equal success to him against Haman? No; it plainly appears that the dispensations of divine providence in favour of the Jews were so far known to them, as to assure them that Providence watched over their interests in a manner peculiar to their nation. Although

* Isa. viii. 19. 20. Psal. cxix. 24.

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most men are disposed to think that their own country is happy above others in the divine favour, and although the Persians at this time seemed to have good reason to flatter themselves with a special interest in the favour of Heaven, yet these wise Persians plainly confessed, that the Jews scattered through the nations were the special objects of the divine care. The wonders done in Babylon were known to all the world, and could not fail to impress all considerate persons with high sentiments concerning the God of Israel. Haman's wise men might have read the sacred books of the Jews, in which they would find that their God had wrought as great wonders for them in times past, as in the period of the Babylonian captivity. They learned instruction from the works of God. They saw that the same God who had preserved Daniel and his companions, watched over the safety and fortune of Mordecai; and they concluded that Haman, his irreconcileable enemy, would fall under the weight of his vengeance.

But it is strange that these wise men, and even the wife of Haman, whatever they thought, expressed to him their mind so fully. If they did not chuse to flatter him, might they not at least have concealed their dismal conjectures, especially as he was led by their counsels to that public disgrace in which he had involved himself, by building a gallows for the man who was appointed to be the king's favourite? for although it was built in the court of his own house, yet the news of its erection was soon to spread. It appears from the freedom they used with Haman, that they already considered him as a lost man, whom it was useless to flatter. They were his friends, as long

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long as his friendship could profit them; and now they seem to have cared little whether he accounted them his friends or his enemies. Their prophecy must have been as unpleasant as the howling of a dog, or even a sentence of death to his ears. The rich hath many friends; but when poverty is seen coming like an armed man, they vanish away like snow in the days of sunshine.

We may, however, learn useful instruction from a prophecy, dictated by reflection on the works of the Lord. Blind heathens have been forced to see, that God takes care of his people; that he often interposes wonderfully for their deliverance; and that he leaves not his gracious works in their behalf unfinished. Why do not God's own people, in the day of their distress, call to remembrance his judgements for their consolation, and the support of their faith? When he begins to deliver them, why do they indulge distrusting fears about the accomplishment of that work which he hath taken into his own hand? Why are they not thankful for the day of small things, as the beginning of months of joy? After Jesus undertook to heal the daughter of Jairus, strong temptations met the mourning parent, when Jesus was on the road to complete his work, and fears began to overwhelm his soul. But what said Jesus? "Fear not, only believe." He believed, and received his daughter back from death.

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DISCOURSE XI.

HAMAN'S FALL AND DEATH.—
CHAP. vi. 14.—CHAP. vii.

VER. 14—*And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlain, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.*

WHEN Haman, on the former day, left the queen's banquet, he went forth joyful and glad of heart. One reason of his joy was, that he was invited to a like banquet next day. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Art thou invited to a banquet? Thou knowest not whether thou shalt partake of it, or whether it will give thee any pleasure to partake of it. Haman was in no haste to this day's banquet. He waited till he was sent for, and would have gladly gone to a house of mourning, rather than the house of feasting, for his mind was ill fitted for the joys of a banquet. But he is not his own master. He must comply, as far as he can, with the will of the king. With

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a heart full of grief he goes to a feast where he must eat the bread of sorrow, and drink his own tears.

CHAP. vii. 1. 2.—*So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again to Esther, on the second day, at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.*

Haman, honoured with the king's society at the banquet of wine, might expect to be consoled for his late disappointment, by new expressions of the royal favour. But soon did his hope, if any remained, prove like the giving up of the ghost. He was brought to the banquet, not that he might enjoy the queen's smiles, but that he might hear an accusation against himself, which touched his life, and to which he could not answer.

The king persisted in his kind sentiments towards Esther. For the third time he promises whatever her petition was, to grant it even to the half of the kingdom. Who would not have been emboldened by a promise so often given? To have deferred the petition any longer, would have but argued an ungrateful distrust of the king's sincerity. Let us remember how much greater encouragment we have to present our requests to God, and what distrust we discover of his faithfulness, if we do not come before his throne of grace with boldness. No less than six times, in the compass of one sentence, does our Lord Jesus assure us that our prayers shall be heard *.

VER. 3.—*Then Esther the queen answered, and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king! and if it*

* Matth. vii. 7. 8.

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please the king, let my life be given at my petition, and my people at my request.

Esther, at last, ventured to bring forth her request. The nature of the case pressed her. The king's solicitations urged her. His kindness and his promises encouraged her. Unnecessary delays are dangerous, especially in matters of great importance.

The request was for her life, and the life of her people. The king was no less surprised at this petition, than Festus was at hearing the accusation of the Jews against Paul. It was certainly not for any such thing as the king supposed. It never came into his mind, that his beloved queen could have any occasion to present a petition to him for her life. Although by his own authority, (but without his knowledge), a sentence of death had been pronounced against her, it must have astonished him to hear, that she and her people were doomed to destruction; and it must astonish the reader of this history, that the king, five years after his marriage with the queen, should have passed a sentence of death upon her whole nation, without knowing it. Into such absurdities are princes led, who are too indolent to look into their own affairs, and leave them to be managed without controul by favourites, who have their own interests to serve, and their own passions to gratify.

VER. 4.—*For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish; but if we had been sold for bond-men and bond-women, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.*

The good queen enforces her petition with resistless eloquence. "I and my people are sold to be destroyed,

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stroyed, to be slain, and to perish." These words are borrowed from the king's edict against the Jews. The king must have been greatly moved to hear that the queen was sold like a sheep to be slaughtered; and not the queen herself only, but all her friends, and, what was more, her whole nation. His heart must have been a thousand times harder than flint, if he had not been moved at this representation of the danger to which she and her people were exposed. If a humane prince will exert his power for the protection of the meanest of his subjects exposed to unmerited danger, what might not the great king of Persia be expected to do for the preservation of a beloved queen, and of all that were dear to her!

It is plain that she was not putting her husband to unnecessary trouble by her petition, which was extorted from her by the most pressing danger; and she informs him, that if the danger had been less dreadful, she would have been silent. If she and her people had been sold like bond-men and bond-women, then she would have left it to time to convince the king that his own interest required his interposition, or she would have left their deliverance to be effected by the gradual operation of divine providence in their behalf. But the case was very different as matters stood. The year was not to end before their utter destruction, unless something was presently done for their preservation; and it was not to be expected that God would shew wonders to the dead, and make them to arise and praise him. The king could not bring them again from the dust of death, however he might regret the loss of so many faithful subjects.

But would it not have been the duty of Esther to supplicat

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supplicate for their relief, although they had been doomed only to slavery? Perhaps she might have seen it her duty to do it, if this had really been the case. But at present, her mind was so deeply possessed with the awfulness of their danger, that she thought, if their misery had been any thing else than what it was, she could have borne it without troubling the king with her complaint. Thus, a man racked with the pains of a gravel, thinks, that if it had been only the gout, he could have borne it with patience; or, if he finds his life endangered by a sore disease, he will tell the physician, that his anxiety is raised only by the dangerous symptoms, and that if these could be removed, he could easily endure the pains of his distemper.

It is to be remembered, that what the queen desired from the king, however necessary and reasonable, was difficult to be granted, because the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be altered. It was therefore necessary to assure the king, that nothing but bitter necessity could have induced her to give him so much trouble. Modest petitioners are heard with favour, when impudent beggars are repulsed with scorn.

The king's interest was deeply concerned in this request on other accounts. The safety of a prince consists in the multitude and happiness of his people. If the Jews had been sold for slaves, the enemy could not have compensated the king's damage, although he had given twice ten thousand talents into the royal treasury. Far less could he have compensated the loss to be sustained by the king in the destruction of so many thousands of useful and laborious subjects, scattered

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scattered throughout every part of his empire. Divine Providence has so closely connected the interests of princes and people, that the throne is established by righteousness and mercy, and subverted by unrighteousness.

VER. 5.—*Then the king Ahasuerus answered, and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he? and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so?*

What! to compass the death of the queen, and, as if that were too small a wickedness, the destruction of all her people also. Was a man so wicked to be found in any of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the king's dominions? If there were such a daring criminal to be found, no death was too terrible for him.

What, then, will our Lord do when he riseth up to revenge the wrongs done to himself in the persons of his brethren; of those who are espoused to him in righteousness, and in judgement, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies? Will he not account the wrongs done to them to have been done to himself? When he maketh inquisition for blood, woe to them that are stained with bloody crimes against his people. The wrath of Ahasuerus against the enemies of the Jews, was a fruit of God's wrath against them. He forgot not his promise to Abraham, "I will bless him that blesseth thee, and I will curse him that curseth thee."

"What and where is he that durst do this thing?" —What if Ahasuerus himself is the man, although it would have been unwise in the queen to tell him that he was. He was certainly, though unconscious of it, a partner in this wickedness; and yet he was fill

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filled with horror at hearing that any person could dare to load himself with such guilt. Thus David was filled with anger against a man who was only the emblem of himself *. Consider what abhorrence you have of the sins of other men, and consider how like your own sins are to theirs, and let your souls be humbled within you. Take care how you speak of the sins of other men, lest your tongues condemn yourselves. Your sins are probably much liker to theirs than you could imagine till you have well considered the matter. Perhaps they are a great deal worse, when every circumstance is considered.

VER. 6.—*And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.*

Haman now finds for what reason he was invited by the queen to her banquet. It was, to be accused to his face of the blackest of crimes. He had an opportunity of saying what could be said (if any thing could be said) in his own vindication, or in mitigation of his offence. But if he had nothing to say, it was to be expected that the confusion of his face would be a witness against him.

This was actually the case: "Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen." He had too good reason to tremble for his life. The queen had brought a dreadful accusation against him, and his guilt was too apparent to be denied, or to be extenuated. And it was of a nature fitted to excite the king's fiercest indignation, and bitterest rage.

In what light did Haman's pride and greatness now appear to him? If he had possessed worlds, he would

* 2 Sam. xii.

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would chearfully have parted with them to have his former conduct buried in oblivion. In all our conduct let us have an eye to that future day which will assuredly come, when our behaviour will appear to ourselves in its true light; and to that day which may come before we quit the world, when it will be followed with its just consequences. How may things that are done would be left undone, if, at the doing, men would realise in their own minds what will be realised one day by the divine providence!

There was a time when Haman thought that life was not life, unless all men bowed the knee to him. But how happy would he now have been, if he could have obtained life upon any terms! What did all his honours formerly avail him, whilst he saw the hated Mordecai at the king's gate? But in his fear, he would gladly have bowed the knee to Mordecai as the price of life.

VER. 7.—*And the king, arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath, went into the palace-garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.*

The king was agitated by his indignation to a degree beyond what we can well conceive. The angry passions rage in the breasts of men, in proportion to the sense they have of their own dignity, of the insults they apprehend to be offered to them, and of the obligations violated by the offender. Ahasuerus was so great a king, that he would think the smallest offence against himself almost unpardonable; but an attempt to destroy his beloved queen was the greatest of all crimes, next to an attempt upon his own life. How

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How unpardonable did this crime appear in one whom he had loved, and trusted, and honoured above all his subjects! No punishment which his power could inflict, appeared to him equal to a crime so atrocious. And yet this was not the worst of the matter. Haman, by his artifice, had drawn his master into partnership of his own crimes. It is probable that Ahasuerus now saw, that Haman's guilt was the decree obtained against the Jews, passed by the consent and authority of Ahasuerus himself. For how could Haman, without such authority, destroy a whole nation of the king's subjects? His wrath must have burnt like a furnace, when he considered how he had been betrayed into a decree so absurd, so wicked, so infamous, that might have proved so fatal to the wife of his bosom, and to all her kindred.

Ahasuerus could not keep his seat. He could not bear the sight of Haman. He ran to the garden, not to give his wrath time to cool, but to give it time to devise proper means for executing all the furiousness of its rage upon a man whom he had devoted to destruction. While Haman was already suffering for his wickedness by the terrors that tormented his heart, Ahasuerus himself suffered some part of what his rashness deserved, by the fiery indignation that raged in his bowels. How miserable is it to feel the torments which either of these passions inflict, when they obtain dominion over the soul!

Haman wished still to live, though in disgrace, and made supplication for his life to a woman whom he had offended beyond hopes of forgiveness. Although it was her duty to forgive him so as to wish well to his soul, it was not her duty to desire his pardon from the

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the king, after he had involved himself so deeply in the guilt of blood. Or, if she had interceded for his life, it was not to be hoped that the king would spare the serpent that had almost stung the wife of his bosom to death. The case was hopeless; but drowning men will grasp at straws or shadows, when they can find no better supports.

The wicked now bows before the righteous; and Haman was not the first, nor will he be the last, of the enemies of God's people, that shall be made to bow before them, and to lick the dust of their feet *.

VER. 8.—*Then the king returned out of the palace-garden, into the place of the banquet of wine, and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.*

When men are enraged, neither their thoughts agree with facts, nor do their words agree with their thoughts. Haman could not well be thought a worse man than he was, and yet the king was disposed to put a worse construction upon his conduct than it deserved. It is not, however, to be supposed, that the king really thought he meant to force Esther before him in the house. Anger is a short madness; and the words of an angry man are like "the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind." If we desire, therefore, to behave uniformly like wise men and like Christians, we must keep our mouths as with a bridle when our hearts are hot within us; and we must keep our hearts with all diligence, that our passions may not overpower our reason.

* Isa. xlix. 15. Rev. iii. 9.

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It is likewise necessary for us to beware of all irritating behaviour, that we may not kindle up fierce passions in the breasts of other men. If they should think, or speak, or act unreasonably, when we have strongly tempted them to be angry, a share of the blame belongs to us; and if we condemn their fury, we should condemn ourselves as sharers of the guilt. Surely the king could not imagine in good earnest that Haman meant to force the queen in his presence; yet Haman, by snares laid for her life, gave the king too good reason to suspect him of every thing wicked.

The king's fury drove him from the palace to the garden, and from the garden to the palace. It had the entire government of his thoughts, of his temper, and of his actions. A petition from any of the king's servants, or from Esther herself, at this time, in favour of Haman, would rather have increased than abated his fury. But indeed Haman had no friends in the king's house to take his part. Some of the king's servants covered his face, and others of them brought in new reports to his disadvantage. A proud man may be flattered, but he cannot be loved. When he falls from prosperity into adversity, he begins to know what sentiments are entertained concerning him.

"Whilst he spoke these words, they covered Haman's face," which the king could not now behold without detestation. The faces of the condemned used to be covered, and sentence of death had already been passed against this wicked man. What a miserable change did a single hour produce! How justly may the words of Bildad concerning the wicked be applied to this wretched man! "Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire

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—fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare *."

VER. 9.—*And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also the gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.*

New charges are produced against Haman, when it was seen that the king was no longer his friend. Had Haman taken care to gain the love of his inferiors during the time of his greatness, he might have found some few, perhaps, that would have expressed their gratitude when he fell; and not many would have assisted in pushing him lower. But his misery was, that he trusted in the multitude of his riches, and in the favour of the king. When the king was his enemy, all men were his enemies; and he had given abundant occasion to complete his destruction. His own hands had made the cords with which he was now girded and strangled.

Harbonah told the king of the gallows that Haman had erected for Mordecai, fifty cubits high. Here was an instance of his intolerable presumption, that he had built this gallows without the king's previous knowledge. But what was sure to inflame the king's revenge beyond measure was, that the servant of the king, for whom the gallows was prepared, was the very man to whom the king owed his life when it was endangered by two wicked conspirators. It looked as

* Job, xviii. 5.—9.

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had been in a confederacy with these men, and wished to revenge their death.

"Then the king said, Hang him thereon."—The king was impatient to have such a viper crushed, and removed out of his sight. He had been considering with himself, perhaps, by what means he might chase him out of the world, so as best to express his own detestation of his conduct, and load him with ignominy. The words of Harbonah decided the business. What can be more ignominious for him than to be hanged on a gallows higher than most of the houses of the city, on a gallows constructed by himself for one of the king's friends, and on the very day on which Haman hoped to have enjoyed the pleasure of seeing Mordecai hanging on it till he died! —"Hang him thereon."

VER. 10.—*So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.*

There is no law more just, says an ancient author, than that the contrivers of destruction should perish by their own contrivances. Who pities Haman hanged on his own gallows? Who does not rather rejoice in the divine righteousness, displayed in that destruction which his own art brought upon him? In his dismal end how fully verified are the words of David! "He (the Lord) ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors. He hath made a pit, and digged it; and he is fallen into the ditch which he hath made: his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate. I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness *."

Let

* Psal. vii.

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Let the workers of iniquity tremble, and turn to the Lord, and seek pardon through the blood of Jesus. Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor, who sought the utter destruction of the Israel of God; and yet he obtained mercy, and the grace of our Lord was abundant to him. "But the Lord shall wound the head of the wicked, the hairy scalp of him that goeth still on in his trespasses."

Let not the children of Zion despair, when their enemies are successful, and no hope seems to be left them. God knows how to find expedients in desperate circumstances, and to turn the blackest darkness into light. He knows how to bring upon the head of his enemies that destruction which they prepare for his own people, and to save them that love him from the greatest deaths.

The king's wrath was never pacified till Haman received the punishment which he so justly deserved. Then his mind enjoyed some ease when he heard that Haman was hanged on his own gallows. But he soon found that much yet remained for him to do, to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite. "When the wicked perish, there is shouting;" but their wickedness may outlive them, and cause much distress and toil when they are gone to receive their reward.

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DISCOURSE XII.

MORDECAI IS ADVANCED TO GREAT HONOURS. LIBERTY IS PROCURED FOR THE JEWS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST THE INTENDED MASSACRE.—CHAP. viii. 1.—15.

VER. 1. 2.—*On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, unto Esther the queen: and Mordecai came before the king: for Esther had told what he was unto her. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.*

BE not solicitous about treasuring up the riches of this world. What you can gain is to-day yours, to-morrow you know not whose it shall be. Should it fall into the hands of your children after you, you know not whether they will be wise men or fools, whether they will be losers or gainers by the possession of it. But you know not whether it may not fall into the hands of your most abhorred enemies. This is often

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often the fate of ill-gotten riches: "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." With what vexation would Haman have thought of that wealth in which he gloried, if he had foreseen that it was to be possessed by a Jewess. Would he not rather have chosen to live a beggar all his days, than leave his wealth to persons whom he so mortally hated?

The queen was enriched beyond her expectations and wishes. Yet the wealth bestowed upon her would enable her to perform important services to her beloved nation. The donation of it by the king, to whom it was forfeited, was a testimony of his affection, to which she still must have recourse, with new petitions for her people. Above all, this donation was a remarkable testimony of the kindness and justice of the divine providence, which put into her hands that immense wealth of the enemy of her nation, by which he would have bribed the king, if a bribe had been necessary, to procure their destruction. The Lord had already not only wrought deliverance for her, but had given her an accession of riches out of the snares that had been laid for her kinsman; and she was thereby encouraged to hope, that he would bring to a happy conclusion that great work that occupied her mind.

Her kinsman, too, was highly advanced, both on her account and his own. The king had formerly caused his favour for Mordecai to be proclaimed through the city of Shushan: but now he loaded him with real and substantial honours, which would put him into a proper condition for protecting his nation, exposed to danger for his sake.

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ter of Mordecai was seated upon an imperial throne, and hitherto it was not known that he stood in any relation to the queen, or had shewed to her the kindness of a father.

The king must surely at least have condemned his own thoughtlessness in inquiring so little after Esther's friends. He now discerned, that besides his unrequited obligations to Mordecai for saving his life, he owed to him likewise the graces and accomplishments of his queen, and almost her life; for he had been to her a second father, without whose kind care none knows what might have befallen her in her tender years.

It would be likewise a powerful recommendation of Mordecai, that he had hitherto lived quietly in a low station, without so much as mentioning his claims to preferment. It appeared plainly, that he was more careful to deserve the king's favour than to enjoy it, and that greatness had no charms but the opportunities it might give him of doing good, or preventing evil. Those are fittest for high stations that are best satisfied with any station in which Providence is pleased to put them.

The king put Mordecai into Haman's place; and the queen, who now thought it highly expedient to inform the king of Mordecai's kindness and relation to her, did likewise make him her steward. To her dying-day, she forgot not the kindness shewed to her in the days of her youth, and behaved as the best of daughters to the best of fathers.

Gratitude to benefactors is essential to a virtuous character. If you call a man ungrateful, you need say nothing more of him, you have already said every thing

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thing that is bad; nor will the highest elevation excuse forgetfulness of benefits received in a lower condition. The blessed Jesus, exalted above men and angels, forgets none of the kindnesses shewn to him in the persons of his brethren in a low condition upon earth; but what is done to the least of them is rewarded as if it had been done to himself. We need not envy those women who ministered to him of their substance in the days of his humiliation, the glorious rewards bestowed upon them in his state of exaltation. We still have it in our power to feed him when he is hungry, to give him drink when he is thirsty, to cloathe him when he is naked; and he will not be unrighteous to forget our works and labours of love to his name. Did Esther in her royal condition retain such a kind remembrance of the friends of her low estate, and shall we doubt of the infinitely superior virtues of him who is the fairest among the children of men, to the operation of whose Spirit we owe every thing that is lovely in our temper and conduct?

Esther, on the throne, retained the kindness of her youth, not only to Mordecai, but to all her friends and all her people.

VER. 3.—*And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears, to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.*

Esther now appeared to be in a very safe condition, and her friend Mordecai had little reason to be apprehensive for his life, when he was honoured to be the king's favourite; but neither of them thought themselves safe or happy till their brethren and people were

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were placed in a like condition. They would have rather chosen, if it had been the will of God, to perish, if their people could obtain deliverance and enlargement, than to live and see the misery threatened fall upon them. Esther, therefore, again ventures to trouble the king with her requests. She falls down before him. She weeps and makes supplication with floods of tears for her people. Happy were they in such an intercessor. Her beauty, her tears, the strong emotions of her heart apparent in her gestures, the amiable virtues which shone forth in her generous concern for her poor friends, were sufficient to have melted the most marble-hearted prince in the world. The humane Ahasuerus could not stand out against such forcible and pleasing importunities. He was requested to do what might expose him to difficulties and dangers; for the fundamental laws of Persia deprived him of the power of abrogating his own laws. But what he could do he would doubtless perform, at such importunities of such a suppliant.

Although Esther had wept and made supplication to God for her people, she did not reckon that she had done what was incumbent on her, without weeping and supplicating the king likewise, at the risk not only of displeasing him, but of her head. When she had by her supplications made some progress in the important business, she wept and supplicated the king a second time, till she obtained all that could be obtained for her people. It is not enough to begin a good work, but we ought to hold on till it be completed, although great difficulties meet us in the face, which it may appear almost impossible to surmount. When we stop short before we have finished what

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we were called to perform, may we not be confounded by that question, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you? Are ye so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, to end in the flesh?"

The queen solicits the king to undo the mischief of Haman. The king himself might, with too good reason, have been implicated with Haman. He was under obligations, from strict justice, to put away the mischiefs which could not be done without his own consent. But the queen wisely overlooked this important consideration, and chose rather to address herself to the king's mercy than to his justice. "Grievous words stir up anger; soft words turn away (or prevent) wrath." It was indeed highly proper that the king should be sensible of his own part in the wrong done to the Jews; but his own conscience would not fail to perform that office, and probably it operated the more powerfully in him, that the Jews themselves kept silence. We feel most powerfully the injuries that we have done, when those to whom they are done shew little disposition to complain.

VER. 4.—*Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther.*—

She would now venture with greater boldness than before to go in before the king, for she was assured of his favour. When we know that we are beloved by superiors, we can go to them with boldness to ask any reasonable favour; yet so variable are the tempers of men, that we may be sometimes deceived in our hopes.

Esther was not, at this time, ashamed of her hope of the favour of Ahasuerus. God himself was her hope, and he inclined the king's heart to favour her.

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So Esther arose, and stood before the king, VER. 5. *And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews, which are in all the king's provinces.*

Observe with what humility and modesty, yet earnest importunity, she presents her request to the king. Esther was well furnished with those amiable qualities which must endear a wife to her husband, and obtain from him every reasonable request. Pride and petulance can obtain nothing without reluctance on the part of him that grants. Humility and submission are the weapons by which a wise woman will encounter opposition in her husband, and the means by which she will obtain what can be obtained by any methods fit to be used by a wife.

If Esther had any interest in the king's favour, the great use she desires to make of it is for the preservation of her people from the mischief devised by Haman. Patriotism and piety were shining ornaments of this princess. She desired not great things for herself. She was well satisfied with her own condition, if she could but see peace on Israel; for Jerusalem was near to her heart, and the welfare of the people of God was dearer to her than either grandeur or life.

VER. 6.—*For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?*

Esther was now the queen of Persia, but still the people of Israel were her people and her kindred.

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Let a true fearer of God be placed ever so comfortably among the sons of men, still it will be his leading desire to see the good of God's chosen, "to rejoice with their joy, and to glory with God's inheritance."

The king had secured Esther's life, but she lets him know, that the destruction of the great enemy of her people, and her security under the king's protection, would be of small avail to her, if her kindred must perish. Her life was bound up in their life. If her heart was broken and crushed by their ruin, what good could her life do her, or what pleasure could the king have any more in beholding her when she was drowned in perpetual sorrows?

There was a consideration that endeared the people of Israel to the queen, still more than their relation to herself. They were the people of the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. Esther did not think fit to mention this motive of her tender regard to the people, when she was presenting her supplications to the king, because he could not have felt the force of it. Thus Nehemiah, in his supplication to the king for Jerusalem, does not speak of it as the centre of the Jewish religion, as the city of the God of Israel, but as the place of his fathers' sepulchres. The king could easily understand the interest that his cup-bearer must take in the place of his fathers' sepulchres; but he knew nothing of that delight which good men take in the habitation of God's house, in the place where his honour dwelleth.

VER. 7.—*Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen, and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged*

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hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews.

The king could not grant to Esther every thing that she requested. But he assures her, that it was not for want of good will, either to herself or to her people, that he did not in direct terms reverse the decree procured by Haman. His love to Esther appeared in the rich present of the confiscated estate of Haman. His good wishes to her people appeared in the ignominious death of their capital enemy. But kings cannot do every thing. The most noble and potent prince in the world had not the power of rescinding his own decrees, however desirous he might be of undoing foolish things done by himself.

VER. 8.—*Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.*

The king himself could not reverse it; and therefore we find that Darius the Mede laboured in vain till the going down of the sun, to save Daniel from the lions' den, and passed a miserable sleepless night in the anguish of a fruitless repentance, for passing a mischievous law, which he could not abolish. The Persians thought their kings highly honoured in that law by which their decrees were made inviolable. But this honour, like some others enjoyed by absolute princes, was a burden too heavy to be borne by mortals. It precluded them from the comforts of repentance, too often necessary for vain men, who, though they would be wise, are born like the wild ass's colt.

The king, therefore, could not give Esther and Mordecai a warrant to pass an act rescissory of his own

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own decrees against the Jews. But he allows them to frame a decree in his name, and to seal it with his ring, for counteracting its effects. As the first decree retained its force, the king could not legally punish those wicked enemies of the Jews, who might take the advantage of it to gratify their malice. Their murders were already legalized by a decree that could not be altered. But a law for the protection of the Jews, which did not rescind the former, might possibly be devised by the wisdom of Mordecai; and to establish such a law, the king gave him his ring. He had been too ready on the former occasion to lend his authority; but now he commits it to a safe hand, and under necessary restrictions. He gave his ring to Haman, to seal a bloody decree; he now gives it to Mordecai, to seal a just and necessary decree for the preservation of many precious lives. The inviolability of the king's decrees, which gave him so much trouble by guarding the wicked laws procured by Haman, would guard the intended decree from violation.

VER. 9. 10. 11.—*Then were the king's scribes called at that time, in the third month, (that is, the month Sivan), on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written (according to all that Mordecai commanded) unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and to the deputies and rulers of the provinces, which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language. And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus's name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries:*

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ries: Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city, to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

Glad would Mordecai and Esther have been, could they have written to all the provinces letters in the king's name, recalling the permission given to the enemies of the Jews to destroy them. But this the laws of Persia would not permit. What, therefore, must be done to save the devoted nation? They are permitted by a new decree to defend themselves, and to destroy their enemies. This, it might be hoped, would have much the same effect as a decree repealing the bloody decree passed against the Jews. When it was known that the queen and the prime minister were Jews, and that the king favoured their cause, it might have been presumed that few would be bold enough to attack them, which would be, by the new edict, to rush upon their own destruction, and to expose the lives of their wives and children, as well as their own. Some, indeed, might entertain such deep-rooted malice against the Jews, as to take advantage of the former edict; but the fault was their own, the risk was chiefly their own; nor could any thing be done by Mordecai or Esther to prevent the mischief. It was to be attributed, not to them, but, in the first place, to the king's former rashness in gratifying the bloody enemy of the Jews; and, in the second place, to that fundamental, but absurd law of the empire, that the king's edicts, whether good or bad, could not be repealed. If men will presume to claim the prerogative

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tive of immutability in their counsels, let them take the consequeces. Men are never more foolish than when they affect the perfection of wisdom.

We regret that permission was given in this edict to the Jews to destroy the wives and children of their enemies, that might rise up against them. But the manners of ancient times are to have some allowance made for them. Jesus, the light of the world, had not yet humanized the nations by the light of his gospel. Besides, it was natural to think, that this permission to the Jews would be a means of preventing the effusion of blood, because many who will risk their own lives, will neither risk the lives of their wives, nor of their children, to gratify their passions. Retaliations in war sometimes involve the destruction of innocent persons, and yet are thought necessary to prevent greater mischief. But we are not bound to justify all that may be done by good men, or every circumstance of good actions. Mordecai and Esther might err, but their errors were not voluntary. It was their desire to prevent, and not to promote, the shedding of innocent blood.

The decree which they framed was sent to every nation of the empire in its own language. All wise lawgivers will address their subjects in a language they understand. God himself wrote the great things of his ancient law in the language of his chosen people, and the laws and doctrines of Christianity were communicated to the world in the language then most generally understood. It is better to speak five words in a known tongue, than ten thousand in an unknown language. Mordecai would have shewn little regard to the life and comfort of his brethren, if he had not caused

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caused the decree to be translated into the languages of the different provinces. Those preachers of the gospel discover as little regard to the eternal life of their hearers, who do not use great plainness of speech, in shewing unto them the way of salvation. Obscurity in our own language is not much less prejudicial than the use of an unknown tongue.

The decree was no sooner passed, and translated into the different languages, than copies of it were sent through every part of the empire, and the swiftest methods of conveyance were used. Mordecai and Esther had sufficient time to give seasonable intimation of the new decree to the Jews and to their enemies. Yet, considering the distance of some provinces, the possibility of untoward accidents, and the advantage of early information, they had no time to lose. Why should that be deferred till another day, which may be better and more safely done at present? How many have lost the season of good works, or the benefits expected from them, by deferring them! How many by delays have lost their precious souls *! But in the present case, the greatest possible expedition was likewise requisite for the comfort of the trembling Jews. Let us not leave those persons under the power of despondency a single hour, whom we may cheer by happy tidings, or by other effectual methods of consolation. If happiness is preferred by ourselves to misery, we do not to others what we wish them to do to us, if we suffer them to languish under heaviness of heart, when we may, by a good word, make them glad.

VER. 12.—*Upon one day, in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus,*

* Eccles. ix. 10.

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Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

The day was fixed by Haman, but the disposing of the lot by which he fixed that day was evidently of the Lord. The lateness of the time gave sufficient opportunities for spreading the new edict, by which the day intended for the destruction of the Jews became a day of destruction to their enemies.

VER. 17.—*The copy of the writing, for a commandment to be given in every province, was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day, to avenge themselves on their enemies.*

It was published to all people, that all the king's subjects might know the real wishes of the king, and might take their side accordingly, as they valued his favour. The knowledge of the decree might make many friends to that nation, and doubtless affrighted many of their enemies. "Where the word of a king is, there is power; for all men seek the favour of the ruler."

It was published unto all people, chiefly as an alarm to the Jews, that they might prepare themselves to resist their enemies, if any enemies made their appearance. They were not so entirely to depend on the favour of their sovereign, as to be unprepared for the contest. He had bound up his own hands from assisting them, or revenging their wrongs. All that he could do for them was to give them the liberty of self-defence, and to afford them his countenance. They must stand up for their own lives, and for the lives of their little ones, if they were attacked. It is to be expected, that those who are not only forewarned of danger, but instructed in the proper means for guarding

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guarding against it, and encouraged with the prospect of success in the use of them, will be ready for the day of decision. Do not they well deserve to perish, who are careless about their own safety? Who will bemoan those who may be safe in the day of evil, and despise the things that belong to their peace, till they be hid from their eyes?

VER. 14.—*So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.*

"The posts were hastened by the king's commandment."—He was now made sensible of the great wrong he had done to the Jews, and made all possible haste to undo, as far as he could undo, what he had done. Are you sensible you have done wrong? Make haste, and delay not to repair the wrong, if it is in your power. How can you say that you repent of the evil that you have done, if you hold it fast? The light of nature teaches men, that they ought, with the first opportunity, to put away the evil of their doings, and to redress the injuries done by their hands, or their tongues, or their pens. As soon as Jesus brought salvation to the house of Zaccheus, he said, "Lord, if I have wronged any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold." Is it your intention, in some future part of your life, to compensate the wrongs you have done in the former part of it? But are you sure that you shall see another week, or even another day? Boast not thyself of to-morrow, unless a prophet of as much credit as Isaiah has brought a message from God, that some more years of life are allotted you.

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"And the decree was given in Shushan the palace." Little good was now expected by the people of God to come from Shushan the palace. From Shushan came the edict for their destruction. But God can make good to spring up to his people where it was least expected. In the very place where it was said, "Ye are not my people," has it been said, "Ye are the children of the living God." The valley of Achor is made by divine wisdom and grace a door of hope. The best of all things in the world came out of Galilee and Nazareth.

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DISCOURSE XIII.

MORDECAI'S GREATNESS, WITH THE HAPPY CHANGE IN THE CONDITION OF THE JEWS.—CHAP. viii. 15.—17.—CHAP. ix. 1.—6.

VER. 15.—*And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced, and was glad.*

MORDECAI, not long before this time, was clothed with sackcloth, and refused, at the request of the queen, to put it off. But now he is clothed with royal apparel, and his head is encircled with a crown of gold. What happy changes has God often made in the outward condition of his people! Let us never say in our prosperity, that "we shall never be moved." Let us never say in the day of adversity, that "our eyes shall never more see good;" or, whatever our outward condition may be, let us not despair of obtaining those changes in our inward condition, which

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which the Redeemer, whom we are called to trust, hath accomplished in innumerable instances. The Lord anointed him "to comfort all that mourn, to give unto them the oil of joy for mourning, the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

Mordecai was now adorned with the ensigns of that high station to which the king advanced him. Perhaps some may ask, whether Mordecai's happiness was increased by his elevation, or not? It certainly was. The greater part of men are fitted to enjoy more happiness in a middling, than in a high condition. But when men are furnished with talents and opportunities for public usefulness, and when their pleasure lies more in doing good to others, than in the enjoyment of ease and social delights, a station that enables them to gratify their wishes, and to exert their power for the public welfare, must afford them more exquisite and sublime pleasure than they would have enjoyed in domestic felicity, or in the endearments of friendship. Joseph was happier in the government of Egypt, which fitted him to be the shepherd and stone of Israel, than in the tents of his father Jacob, although he was his father's delight. David found much more trouble on a throne than ever befel him when he was following the ewes with young; but he was happier on the throne, because his elevation enabled him to do greater services for God and for Israel. Mordecai was raised on high by Divine Providence to be a saviour to Israel, and enjoyed the sublime pleasure of knowing that millions blessed God on his account.

Let us not, however, envy the great. Multitudes of them might have been far happier, if they had moved

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moved in a lower sphere. We are not all Davids or Mordecais. Agur was a very good man, and yet he prayed that God might give him neither poverty nor riches. Think not that you are better fitted than Agur to resist the temptations attendant on riches. Christ tells us, that it is as easy for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, as for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But nothing is impossible with God; and Mordecai, amidst all his wealth and power, hastened towards the possession of that kingdom which cannot be moved.

The city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad for the fall of Haman, and the exaltation of Mordecai. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; and when the wicked perish, there is shouting." Mordecai was an exile, and a worshipper of the God of Israel; yet the people of Shushan, who now knew his virtues, rejoiced that he was put into the place of Haman, who undoubtedly was an oppressor to other subjects of the king besides the Jews. The perplexity into which the city was thrown by the cruel decree against the Jews, prepared it for rejoicing in the exaltation of a man who employed his power for their protection. Bloody men are abhorred by their fellow-creatures, and virtue recommends itself to the admiration of those whose practice is not in all things conformable to its rules. An Herod venerated John Baptist.

VER. 16. 17.—*The Jews had light and gladness, and joy, and honour. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day;*

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day; and many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

Many expressions are used to signify the joy and exultation of the Jews on this occasion; and no expressions are sufficient to describe those transports of gladness which they must have felt when the king's commandment and decree came abroad. According to the days wherein they had sorrow, and wherein they had seen evil, they were made glad. Let us never sink under the weight of affliction, if the Lord is our God. Who had ever more reason than the Jews, in the interval between the two edicts, to say, "The Lord hath led us, and brought us into darkness, and not into light?" The Babylonian captivity was a less hopeless calamity than the situation to which they were reduced by a general sentence of death. But the Lord brought them again out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands asunder. Now might they sing with pleasure these delightful words of David, "Thou wilt save the afflicted people, but wilt bring down high looks; for thou wilt light my candle. The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness."

"No affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous;" yet afflictions have often terminated in joys never felt by those who never had changes. Men never feel the joys of health that were never sick; and those whose souls have been failing within them, through trouble, oppression, and fear, know best the pleasure of ease and safety. It will be a great enhancement of the blessedness of heaven to redeemed saints, that they were once in a state of sin and sorrow. When we are in trouble, let us consider by

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what means joy may be brought out of it, that we may learn to rejoice in hope. Through the grace of God, thorns may be made to bear grapes, and thistles figs, for he is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

There is one thing that deserves observation in this joy of the Jews, that it was occasioned, not by a full security given them for their safety, but by that liberty which was given them to defend themselves from their enemies. They had still reason to dread an attack, but they had reason, too, to hope for victory. We would never taste joy in the things of this world, if we could not take pleasure but in prospects altogether unclouded. Who can say that he shall never more meet with dangers, or taste sorrows? We may be assured, on solid grounds, that all things shall work together for our good, and that heaven shall be our final portion; but what unpleasant things, in the present life, may appear to divine wisdom a proper preparation for our final happiness, we cannot tell. This we know, that when our prospects are in some degree pleasant, we ought to be thankful, and especially when the dark prospects are brightened, although the events in question cannot be certain. Some of the Jews might lose their lives, yet God had wonderfully interposed for their safety; and they had good reason to praise God for what was done, and to trust him for what was yet to be done.

They had "a feast and a good day," wherever the king's decree came. "A feast is made for laughter." Feasts, on proper occasions, are not unbecoming the people of God. Jesus himself did not refuse his presence to feasts. Doubtless, on this feast and good

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day the hearts of the Jews were enlarged, not only with joy, but with kind affections towards their brethren, "partakers with them of the benefit," and with gratitude to the God of their salvation. Whilst they congratulated one another, and praised the exertions of Mordecai and Esther, they did not forget to praise the Lord, who had turned the heart of the king of Persia to favour them *, and who had turned a gracious ear to the voice of their prayers and their supplications. These are pure and lasting joys which terminate in God, the Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift comes.

The Jews had honour, as well as light and joy. The Babylonian captivity, and their dispersion among the nations, brought them into contempt: "They were made a reproach unto their neighbours, and a by-word among the people." But God's signal interposition in their behalf filled beholders with wonder and respect. They appeared to be the favourites of the God of heaven. "They said among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them." God hath promised to wipe away the reproach of his people, and get them fame and glory, when he rises up to plead their cause. Let us never fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their revilings. Our honour, as well as our life and property, is in the hand of God; and those who are precious in his sight will sooner or later be honourable in the eyes of men.

"And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell on them." It is not impossible for those who are not sprung from Abraham to become Jews. "They are not all Israel that

* Ezra, vii. 27. 28.

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are of Israel;" and those may be "Israelites indeed" who are sprung from Japhet or from Canaan.

"Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?" says Jeremiah. Under the Old-Testament dispensation, the nations were steady to their false religions. No nation changed their gods, which yet were no gods, (if you except the Edomites, who were subdued by Hyrcanus, and adopted the Jewish religion; but these Edomites were only a part of the nation that had taken up their residence in the land of Judea). It was reserved for the glory of the New-Testament dispensation, that nations under it should be born in one day to God; yet, in the days of old, many individuals became Jews after their return from the Babylonian captivity, especially at those seasons when God shewed forth his glory in doing marvellous works for his people.

"The Lord is known by his judgements." He was made known to many of the heathen throughout the Persian empire at this happy time, when the king Ahasuerus's heart was so unexpectedly turned to favour God's people. They saw that the God of heaven was the God of Israel, and that works were done by him, which no other god could do. The fear of the Jews fell upon them, for they saw that the greatest man next to the king in the whole empire was broken and crushed in his contest with them.

If the observation of single acts of the divine procedure had such happy effects in the conversion of the Gentiles, what effect ought the consideration of all God's works of wonder to have upon our hearts? The salvation of the Jews, in the days of Ahasuerus, is one of the manifold salvations which God wrought

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for his people in ancient days. But what are all the temporal salvations wrought for ancient Israel, to the great salvation wrought for Jews and Gentiles by our Lord Jesus Christ! and how wonderful are the salvations that have been wrought in different ages for the church! "Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and dost wonderful things; thou art God alone."

Who could have believed that the contrivances of Haman for the destruction of the Jews would have terminated in the increase of their nation? The lovers of the name of the God of Israel would tremble at Haman's devices, lest the name of Israel should be put out, and the worship of the God of Israel should be extirpated from the earth. But the revolution of a few weeks convinced them that their God was the same God that he had ever been; and that wherein his enemies dealt proudly, he was still above them. Death and destruction are in the hand of the Lord, and he can make them instrumental for the life, and for bringing about the safety, of his people. "Before him darkness becomes light, and sorrow is turned into joy. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and carrieth the devices of the froward headlong. So the poor have hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth."

CHAP. ix. VER. 1.—*Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was*

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turn to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them).

"The hope of the righteous is gladness, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish." Of the truth of this maxim of wisdom, we have a remarkable instance in the events of the month Adar, when the decree of king Ahasuerus was put in execution. The enemies of the Jews had looked forward to that day with great pleasure. It was to be the day on which the name of Israel was to be abolished, and the worship of their God utterly extinguished. But, by the good providence of God, it was a day in which the bitter enemies of the Jews were destroyed, and their nation blessed with a testimony of the favour and power of their God, which made his name known through all the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the Persian empire. "The God of their mercy prevented them;" and at the time when their enemies had hoped to gain a complete victory, they were subdued and destroyed. Little do the enemies of Zion know the intention of the God of Zion, when he covers her with a cloud, and gives scope to their malice. Their conjectures appear to be built on solid grounds, when they predict the downfall of Zion; but the wisest conjectures of men must give place to the most improbable predictions of the word of God, which assure us that the enemies of Zion shall be covered with confusion, and that God himself will establish her. The times have been, when many nations were gathered against her, that said, "Let her be defiled, and let our eyes look upon Zion." "But they knew not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understood they his counsel; for he gathered them as sheaves into the

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floor, and made the horns of the daughter of Zion iron, and her hoofs brass, that she might arise and thresh, and beat in pieces many people, and consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth." Wait patiently for God in the day of clouds and thick darkness. He often makes the day dark with night, when at the evening-time it shall be light.

VER. 2.—*The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities, throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.*

"Thou shalt not kill." This commandment, in some cases, binds us to kill. It requires us to use all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life; and in preserving our own lives, we may be reduced to the unpleasant necessity of taking away the lives of other men. The Jews were compelled, on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, to take arms into their hands, to destroy all that might rise up against them; and they acted wisely in uniting themselves in large bodies to resist the power of their enemies. Had they stood single in arms, they might all have been destroyed with ease. But their combination in the various cities of the king's dominions made them terrible and irresistible. Let us learn from their example to stand fast in one spirit, and with one mind, striving together against the enemies of our souls, who endeavour to rob us of our faith, more precious than our lives. The church is terrible, like an army with banners, when her rulers and members are closely united under the Captain of salvation, to oppose her enemies.

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No man could now withstand the Jews, for the fear of them fell upon all people. They had the king, the queen, the prime minister upon their side, and, what was still more, they had the providence of God upon their side. "He caused judgement to be heard from heaven," as audibly as if an angel had proclaimed his favour to the Jews, and his indignation against their enemies. The wonderful works of Providence have oft struck terror into the hardiest enemies of Zion *.

VER. 3.—*And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.*

There were two decrees in equal force, which might have given them a fair pretence for taking the part of the Jews, or of their enemies, as they pleased; but it was plain that the king's favour was towards the Jews, and that if they expected any favour from him, it was necessary to secure the good-will of Mordecai. They chose that side in the contest which their own interest prescribed. What a pity is it that all princes do not favour the cause of religion! If they did, iniquity would be compelled to stop her mouth, and those men who do not value religion would treat it at least with respect.

VER. 4.—*For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.*

He was famous for his virtue and wisdom, as well as for the honours to which the king had advanced him. He gained more and more respect the better he

* Psal. xlviii. 5. 6.

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he was known, and all the respect entertained for him by the king, or by his subjects, contributed to the success of the Jews in the day when their fate was to be decided. It was this that made Mordecai's fame and greatness a pleasure to himself, and the cause of thanksgiving from him unto God. He had been formerly as a humble shrub in the valley, and then his obscurity was so little disagreeable to him, that he never called to the king's mind the great services he had done for him in saving his life, nor would suffer the queen to make any mention of his relation and kindness to her, although, by the bare mention of these, the king would have been induced to place him in a much higher station. He was now like a tall cedar, with spreading branches, and a shadowing shroud; and he was highly pleased with this change in his condition, because it enabled him to afford shelter to all his people.

VER. 5.—*Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.*

It may appear strange that the Jews now found any enemies bold enough to contend with them in battle. The king was their friend, God was their friend; what could those expect who sought their lives, but destruction to themselves? It is indeed wonderful, but not uncommon, for men to value the gratification of their malignant passions above their best interests, and above their safety. At the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, it is well known that the Jews themselves did more mischief to one another, than all the harm they suffered from the fury of their conquerors. The different parties, when

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they found respite from the Romans, destroyed one another within the walls, and destroyed their provisions, and then brought upon themselves a famine, which destroyed them by thousands. But we need not look seventeen hundred years back to see the tyrannizing power of malice and hatred over the minds of men. Are there not many who subject themselves to bitter remorse, to ruinous fines, or to an ignominious death? Are there not many more who subject themselves to the curse of God, merely to gratify their accursed spite against their fellow-men?

Many of the enemies of the Jews, doubtless, were overawed by the power of Mordecai, and either sat quiet in their dwellings, or joined with the Jews. Many chose rather to be quiet than to venture their lives in battle with enemies that were sure to be victorious. But there were others, not in small numbers, who chose to venture, or rather to sell their lives, and the lives of all that were dear to them, rather than lose the opportunity given them by law, of attempting to destroy a race of men whom, though innocent, they hated with a deadly hatred. These men combined in the different cities to fight against the Jews. But their confederacy was against the God of heaven, who spoiled them of their courage, and gave them into the hands of the Jews, to do to them as they would. They were so far from gaining their malicious purposes at the expence of their lives, that victory, and glory, and triumph to their hated enemies, were the fruit of their cruel attempt. Vain it is to fight against God, or against those whom he loves and protects. If God be against us, who can be for us? If we harden ourselves against the Almighty,

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mighty, we cannot prosper. It were better for us to dash our heads against the craggy rock, than to rush upon the thick bosses of the buckler of the Almighty.

Why should men fight against God? And yet there are too many who fear not to carry the weapons of an unrighteous warfare against their Maker and their Judge. "Whatever ye have done, or not done, to one of the least of my brethren," says Christ, "ye have done, or not done, to me." Enmity against the people of God is enmity against God himself; and surely "all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."

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DISCOURSE XIV.

NUMBERS OF THE SLAIN. A SECOND BATTLE AT SHUSHAN.

VER. 6.—11.—*And in Shushan the palace, the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, and Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, and Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand.*

EVEN in Shushan, the royal city, under the eye of the king, there were more than five hundred men that combined, in defiance of the king's known sentiments, to attack the Jews. But they meddled to their own hurt. When we consider the audacity of that behaviour to which their malice prompted them, we see that Mordecai had too much reason to tell Esther that she would not be safe in the king's palace, if she did not intercede with the king. The men that could take the pretence of a law to attack the Jews to their certain destruction, might have been prompted by the same outrageous malice to attack Esther

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Esther in the palace, when they could plead the king's authority for their enterprise.

These five hundred men in Shushan, who sold their lives in this desperate cause, were doubtless some of Haman's creatures, who had learned from him to hate the Jews with a bloody hatred. Haman's ten sons were at the head of them, and shared in their fate. They were doubtless trained up by their father in the hatred of that nation; and his miserable end, instead of opening their eyes, irritated their resentment, to their own destruction.

It was natural, some will say, for Haman's sons to account that people their enemies, by the means of whom their father suffered an ignominious death. It was natural, it must be confessed; but it does not follow that it was right. Children are to honour their parents while they live, and venerate their memory when they are dead, but not to follow their example in any thing that is evil. The children of wicked parents ought to remember, that their duty to their Maker must have the precedency to all other duties; and that to rebel against God, because their parents rebelled against him, is not more excusable, than for a man to be a thief, or a traitor, or an adulterer, because his father was so before him. God commanded his people, when they were carried away captives for their transgressions, to confess their own iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers. The holy son of the wicked Ahaz made a full confession of the sins committed by his father, and by the people under his influence, and deserved high praise for reversing all his wicked institutions *. Jeroboam had only one

* 2 Chron. xxix.

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son in his house who discovered a dislike of his father's conduct, and was the only member of the family who died in peace. "Fill ye up the measure of your fathers," said Jesus to the Jews, warning them that their father's example would be so far from justifying their wicked conduct, that the vengeance of Heaven was brought the nearer to them, that their sins were but a continuation of the sins of their progenitors.

Parents, pity your children, if you will not pity yourselves. You know what force the example and influence of parents has. If you profess bad principles, you of course train up your children in the profession of the same. If you openly practise wickedness, you teach your children to practise it likewise. Thus you pull down vengeance, not only upon yourselves, but upon your houses. You see that Haman was the enemy of the Jews, and of the God of the Jews, and the punishment of his wickedness fell heavy, not only on himself, but upon all his family, which was probably rooted out of the earth. His sons might have been suffered to live in obscurity, if they had been willing to live peaceably. But they had drunk deep of their father's spirit, and followed his example, and ten (probably all of them) perished on that fatal day, on which their father, a few months before, had hoped to feast his eyes with the blood of those whom he chose to account his enemies.

"But on the spoil laid they not their hands."—It is not always good to seize all the money to which one has a legal right. There are many cases in which a regard to our own credit, and there are others in which a sense of duty, resulting from singular circumstances,

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cumstances, should bind up our hands from receiving what we might otherwise take without injustice. The king's edict gave the Jews a right to take the spoil of their enemies *. But for their own honour, and for the credit of their religion, they chose to leave the spoils of their enemies to be enjoyed by others. The tongue of slanderers might have alledged that they had slain innocent persons with the guilty, to enrich themselves.

They had been accused as a wicked people, whom it was good for mankind to destroy from the face of the earth. Their noble disinterestedness was a refutation of this calumny. It was evident from their conduct that they were not lovers of money; and "the love of money is the root of all evil." The apostle Paul shewed disinterestedness of spirit in a higher degree, when he laboured for years in places where, for the honour of that gospel which he preached, he would receive no recompence from his hearers, that it might not be accounted a fable cunningly devised for the profit of them who preach it †.

VER. 11. 12.—*On that day the number of them that were slain in Shushan the palace, was brought before the king. And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now, what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request? and it shall be done.*

The king had an account brought to him of the number of the slain in the imperial city. It was highly proper that he should cause this account to be brought before him. If husbandmen be diligent to know

* Chap. viii. 11. † Acts, xviii.

know the state of their flocks, and look well to their herds, how much more ought kings to inform themselves of the affairs of their kingdom! Ahasuerus might learn wisdom from the account brought him of the slaughter of the enemies of the Jews. By his rashness he had occasioned the slaughter. If five hundred men were slain in Susa, what numbers might be supposed to be slain through all the provinces? What bloodshed had been the fruit of one thoughtless act of government! It may be hoped that Ahasuerus learned wisdom for the time to come. Never in the succeeding years of his reign was he chargeable with such folly. At a great expence he learned a very needful lesson, To do nothing without consideration of the consequences.

The king brings to the queen his information concerning the slaughtered enemies of the Jews.

"Five hundred," says he, "were slain in Shushan the palace," besides the ten sons of Haman, the most formidable and the most enraged of them. The king could not yet tell her how many were slain through the large extent of his dominions, but he justly infers from the number of the slain in one city, that it must be very great in all the cities and provinces together. This piece of information the king hoped would be very grateful to Esther, as it would ease her mind of those griefs which had long oppressed it. She indeed had good and well-grounded hopes before this time, that the enemies of her people would fall in the contest, and now she enjoyed the satisfaction of knowing that her hopes were realized.

We must not rejoice in the destruction of our enemies,

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mies, nor must our hearts be glad when they stumble. This is the doctrine of the prophets, as well as of the apostles *. Yet God's people have good reason to rejoice at the fall of their irreconcileable enemies, when they see the mercy of God to themselves, and when they see the safety of the church in the destruction of those who hated them: "When God shoots at the wicked with an arrow, and wounds them suddenly, the righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in him, and all the upright in heart shall glory †."

"Now, what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or, what is thy request further? and it shall be done."—It is reported of Mary Queen of Scotland, that her household-servants were always glad when she was put into a passion; for, when she was restored to good humour, she made them more than a sufficient recompence for all past unkindnesses. Thus Ahasuerus, sensible of the wrong he had done to his queen, endeavoured to banish all remembrance of them, by heaping upon her unexpected kindnesses. All of us are liable to starts of bad humour, and may behave unkindly to those who are dearest to us; or we may, through want of due consideration, give them much pain without intending it. When we are made sensible of such conduct, let us repair it with advantage. Whilst our friends live, if we have treated them with unkindness, there is opportunity to obliterate the wrong. They may die, and then it will be sealed up, and nothing will be left for us but unavailing regret.

VER. 13.—*Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do*

* Prov. xxiv. 17. † Psal. lxiv. 9.

to-morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.

"Dearly beloved," says the apostle, "avenge not yourselves." "Love your enemies," says Christ, "that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." Was Esther not a daughter of the Lord Almighty? or was the Spirit of the Old-Testament dispensation of religion different from that spirit of love, and of a sound mind, which is given unto us?

Esther was undoubtedly a saint of God, and the spirit of love dwelt in her. We have already seen that the writers of the Old Testament, as well as those of the New, forbid revenge *. But self-defence is licensed and required under the New, as well as the Old Testament. Esther knew that there were still many deadly enemies of the Jews in Shushan, who might, if they were suffered to live, harass or destroy them. She desires that they might receive the just reward of their malice.

Lukewarmness, and even cruelty, have often assumed the dress of charity. The children of Israel, after the death of Joshua, were cruel to the rising generation, when they spared the wicked Canaanites. Saul brought wrath upon himself, when he spared Agag. Samuel performed an act of humanity, when he hewed to pieces before the Lord, a tyrant who had made many women childless, for a warning to other despots. "Cursed be he," says Jeremiah on a certain occasion, "who doth the work of the Lord deceitfully. Cursed be he who keepeth back his sword from shedding blood." A curse came upon Meroz, for sparing the blood of the Canaanitish enemies.

* Prov. xxiv. 17.

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enemies of Israel. A worse curse might have come upon Esther, if she had neglected the opportunity graciously afforded her by God, for securing the peace of Israel by the destruction of Haman's creatures. They were a race of vipers. Their venom was not diminished. If they had not been crushed, they might have found an opportunity to sting the man who had brought destruction on their companions in wickedness.

Beware of making a bad use of this piece of history. Such circumstances as those in which Esther was placed, will probably never occur to any of you. The care of the lives of all the people of God came upon her, and the enemies of the Jews, by their late behaviour, were seen to be hardened beyond all hopes of reformation. When the hand of the Lord was lifted up, they would not see it, but rushed upon him, even upon the thick bosses of his buckler. Your enemies may be reclaimed. Your duty, according to Solomon and Paul, is, if your enemies are hungry, to feed them; if they are thirsty, to give them drink. Thus you will heap coals of fire upon their heads, and the Lord will reward you. Remember how Jesus, when he was dying for your sins, prayed for his murderers. You know not what manner of spirit you are of, if you draw into an ordinary precedent extraordinary cases, from the histories of Elijah, or Moses, or Esther. Christ left you an example to follow his steps on every occasion.

"Let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows;" on that gallows which their father set up for Mordecai. Kings can take away our lives, that is all they can do against us; and yet, when we are [illegible] they may expose our bodies to infamy. Haman's ten sons

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sons could feel no more pain from the hand of men. But their ignominious exposure on the gallows erected by their father was an awful warning to other enemies of the Jews. It was a standing proclamation of the favour of God to that nation, of his indignation against their enemies, and of the righteousness of his judgements. Those who saw them, saw good reason for saying, "Truly there is a reward for the righteous; truly there is a God that judgeth in the earth." The Lord causeth his wonderful works to be remembered. He would not have us forget his awful, any more than his pleasant works, that he may be glorified by us as a great God and a Saviour.

VER. 14.—*And the king commanded it so to be done, and the decree was given at Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons.*

From the ready acquiescence of the king in Esther's request, we may reasonably conclude that he saw it to be just and proper. After what had newly happened, it was not likely that he would give a rash assent to a bloody decree. "But a wise king will crush the wicked, and bring the wheel over them."

By the king's commandment, "the ten sons of Haman were hanged upon the gallows." The king soon relented after he had passed a too severe decree against Vashti; but he did not repent, nor had he any reason to repent, of what he did against Haman. All the children of that insolent favourite were given up to infamy after death. We need not on this occasion reflect on the uncertainty of royal favour. Haman and his family might still have enjoyed the smiles of the king, if they had deserved them. Their own wickedness destroyed and disgraced them; for "they

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drew iniquity to themselves with cords of vanity, and sinned as it were with a cart-rope."

VER. 15.—*For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hands.*

They provided for things honest in the sight of all men. When they laid not their hands on the prey, it would easily be believed that they had killed no innocent persons. It was evidently not the desire of gain, but a just regard to their own safety, that induced them to kill so many of their enemies.

These enemies of the Jews that escaped on the thirteenth day of the month, would think that the bitterness of death was past. The law, as it then stood, exposed them to no further danger. But these enemies of God who escape shall not flee away: "Mischief shall hunt the violent man till he be ruined." If he is not ruined to-day, he will be ruined to-morrow; if not to-morrow, on some following day known to the Lord, and probably on a day when he is not expecting it. The bitterness of death cannot be past whilst the sentence of the Almighty is standing in force against the wicked.

VER. 16.—*But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand; but they laid not their hands on the prey.*

How many were the enemies of the Jews, even after they were known to be favoured by the king, when in all appearance avowed enmity against them was to end in speedy destruction! But many as they were,

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were, there were more with the people of God than against them, and their enemies were made to lick the dust. Let not those who have God on their side tremble at the multitude and strength of their enemies. "Associate yourselves, O ye people! and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us." Immanuel is our security from every danger.

The Jews, in none of the provinces of the king's dominions laid their hand upon the spoil. They had been in great fear of death, and they thought it a great matter to have their lives saved, without making gain of their enemies. "The life," says our Lord, "is more than the meat, and the body than raiment." When men are in extreme danger of their lives, or have newly escaped from it, money goes for little. Were we possessed with a due concern about deliverance from that sentence of death which has passed upon all men, or with a fervent gratitude for deliverance from so great a death, our attachment to the things of the present world would be greatly weakened. What will money avail us, if we must perish? If we are redeemed from destruction, we will be happy and thankful, whether we possess much, or little, or nothing at all, of the good things that perish in the using.

Christians have often censured the whole body of the Jews, as men of a selfish and rapacious spirit. The charge has probably exceeded truth. But, as far

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as occasion has been given for it, it has been owing, in a great measure, to the oppressions exercised upon that unhappy nation, which have irritated their spirits, and weakened or destroyed their sense of justice towards those whom they considered as their enemies. Certain it is, that they were far from discovering a rapacious spirit in the days of Esther. Many who name the name of Christ might learn from them to set their minds on things above, rather than on things of the earth. They chose to adorn their profession, by making it apparent that they sought not riches by means which they disapproved, although they would have appeared safe and honourable to any others but themselves.

VER. 17.—*On the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day of the same, rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

On the thirteenth day they fought for their lives, and on the fourteenth they rested and rejoiced in their preservation and victory. The battle was probably sore in some places where their enemies were strong and many; but every where they gained the victory, and the joys of God's salvation were an abundant recompence for their toils and dangers. Let all God's people patiently endure the tribulations assigned to them, and courageously fight those battles which they are called to sustain. There is hope in their latter end, and the greater their fight of affliction, the sweeter is that rest which the Lord will give from their sorrows and fears. Jesus fought and conquered, and entered into his rest; and "it is a faithful saying, that if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Before the time of reigning with him is come, we

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may hope that in this world days of rest and joy will often succeed nights of sore affliction *.

VER. 18.—*But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together, on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same, they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.*

The Jews of Shushan did not so soon obtain rest, as the Jews of the provinces. They were fighting on the fourteenth day of the month, when their brethren were resting, and delighting themselves in the abundance of God's goodness. Yet they rested at last, and had as good a day on the fifteenth as their brethren had on the fourteenth. We must wait God's time for days of rest and gladness, and his time is always the best. It was good for the Jews at Shushan to be employed two days in encountering and destroying their enemies. Their rest was the more pleasant when it came, that they had made an utter end of those who plotted against their life.

The day of feasting and rest was sweetened by the preceding days of labour and fear. Pleasant is health after sickness. Safety is delightful after extreme danger; and gladness is double joy to those whose souls were depressed with sorrow. In days of prosperity it is good to look back to days of adversity, that we may feel the value of our present enjoyments, and that our hearts may be filled with the praises of him who hath turned our darkness into light, and our mourning into dancing.

VER. 19.—*Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled towns, made the fourteenth day of the*

* Isa. iv. 3. Psal. cxxv. 4. Isa. lvii. 15. 16. chap. xl.

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the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

Their hearts overflowed with joy and gladness. They wished never to forget what God had done for them, and therefore they resolved annually to observe that day on which they had obtained joy and gladness, as a day of joy, and of the exercise of mutual benevolence. We ought never to forget the happy changes which God has made in our condition. Often should we call back to our remembrance the mercies of former days. This will be our wisdom and our happiness. It will be a frequent renewal of former joys, and a means of preserving alive that gratitude which we owe to the God of our mercies.

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DISCOURSE XV.

ORDINANCE OF MORDECAI AND ESTHER FOR OBSERVING THE DAYS OF PURIM. —CHAP. ix. 20.—32.

VER. 20. 21.—*And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, to stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly.*

SOME of those days of the year in which God appeared in the glory of his power to his people, by working signal deliverances for them, or by giving them signal testimonies of his favour, were appointed by him to be annually observed as days consecrated to his honour. Thus the passover was a yearly commemoration of the redemption of Israel from Egypt, and the Pentecost of the giving of the law.

But it is not within the power of men to give holiness to a day. God alone, therefore, has authority to appoint stated days for religious services. He alone can

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can bless such days, as means of spiritual improvement. Without his presence and blessing, we meet together for the worse, and not for the better; and therefore we must be assured, when we expect his blessing, that we have his warrant for our meetings. That occasional fasts and thanksgivings, on proper calls of providence, may and ought to be appointed by public authority, there is no reason to doubt; but stated fasts or thanksgivings can be warrantably appointed by no less authority than his on whose shoulders the government of the churches is laid. We must observe all things whatsoever he has commanded us, and nothing else, as a religious ordinance; and, lo! he will be with us always.

But why, then, did Mordecai appoint the feast of Purim? Surely Mordecai could not take it upon him to appoint a religious festival without a divine warrant. He knew that neither Joshua nor David had appointed holy days to be annually observed by the nation, as commemorations of their glorious victories, or of the happy settlement of the people in consequence of their victories. He knew that Moses himself, the lawgiver of the nation, had appointed no solemn feasts by his own authority. He would not even authorise those who could not observe the passover on the ordinary day to observe it on another day, till he had received commandment about it from heaven.

We must conclude, therefore, either that Mordecai was authorised by the Holy Ghost to appoint this festival; or, which appears rather to be the truth, that the feast of Purim was not one of the holy festivals, but a civil festival appointed for joy and feasting, in

commemoration of an event that ought never to be forgotten. Mordecai gave no orders concerning sacrifices to be offered on this day, or even concerning any act of religious worship. He doubtless hoped that thanksgiving and praise would be offered to God on every return of this joyful festival, but did not reckon himself authorised to publish a law for this purpose. His intention was to perpetuate the remembrance of a glorious deliverance, and he left it to the consciences and grateful feelings of the people, to determine what acknowledgements should be made to God, according to the general rules of his word.

Mordecai wrote to the people far and near, to keep both the fourteenth and the fifteenth day of the month Adar as days of rejoicing. They were both of them days of rest, the former day in the provinces, the latter in Shushan; and he would have the people, in every part of the world, to remember, not only their own particular deliverances, or those which their fathers obtained, but deliverances granted to others of their people. Jews were bound, and Christians are surely not less bound, to consider themselves as members one of another, and to consider the mercies bestowed upon their brethren as mercies to themselves.

VER. 22.—*As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.*

All things work together for good to the people of God, by promoting their happiness, as well as their holiness. The remembrance of their toils sweetens the

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rest which succeeds them. The sleep of the labouring man is sweet, although he should sup sparingly before he goes to rest. The tears which the Christian must often shed are remembered with joy, when they are wiped away by returning prosperity. Mordecai wished the Jews to be ever mindful of their sorrows, that their joy might be full.

The days of Purim were intended to be days of feasting and gladness. In the season of their distress, they would scarcely be able to eat that bread which was necessary to the preservation of their life; when they thought of their deliverance, and of the mercy of God in their deliverance, they would eat their bread with gladness, and drink their wine with merry hearts.

These days were to be "days of sending portions one to another." Their common danger, and their common deliverance, would endear them to one another, and open their hearts to mutual kindness. How much more ought our common salvation by Christ, from our general misery, to bind the hearts of Christians to one another! We were all involved in guilt and ruin by sin, and the same sin was the source of misery to us all! We are all redeemed by the same precious blood; we are all saved by the same almighty arm. Let our common joy in Christ's salvation overflow in mutual love. If we are penetrated with the love of Christ, will we not love all those who are the objects of the same exceeding riches of grace?

"Sending of gifts to the poor," was to be another of the duties of this happy day. There might be many poor Jews, who were not able to afford an entertainment for this day of joy. But Mordecai would

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have the poor to rejoice as well as the rich. Although we find our circumstances unprosperous, we must not, on that account, reckon that we have no right, or that we are not bound, to rejoice in public mercies. That the poor may not be tempted to repine when others rejoice, as if they were cut off from the public happiness, we should be ready to communicate to them a share of our blessings, especially when our hearts overflow with joy in God's goodness to ourselves. Why should the rich eat their morsel alone, whilst others are pining with hunger? If you desire the continuance of your own happiness from divine mercy, endeavour to diffuse it by wise liberality. Every expression of divine goodness to ourselves is a new obligation laid upon us to do good, to those especially, who have most need of our bounty. Above all, the redemption by Christ binds us to be merciful *.

VER. 23.—*And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them.*

They chearfully promised to comply with Mordecai's wishes, both from a regard to his authority, and from a lively sense of the mercy bestowed upon them. It is a happy thing when superiors require nothing from their inferiors, but what themselves see to be just and reasonable.

Mordecai's letters could not but have a mighty influence upon a nation who were indebted to him for their lives. He could not be blamed for bringing them into the dangers which they had escaped, because it was his stedfast adherence to his duty which provoked Haman's wrath. But he deserved no less praise than Esther herself for their preservation. Gratitude

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

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titude will induce us to do many things for those who have been the instruments of preserving our lives. What shall we render to the Author of our lives, and to him who hath redeemed our lives from destruction?

VER. 24.—*Because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot) to consume them, and to destroy them.*

The remembrance of Haman's fearful plot against all the Jews, powerfully instigated them to observe those days of joy that were appointed by Mordecai. When they considered how formidable the enemy had been, and how bent upon their destruction, they could not think of their deliverance without surprise, and joy, and thankfulness.

It would be useful to us for increasing our joy in the Lord, to think upon those enemies of the church that have often brought her into extreme dangers, that we may see the glory of that grace and power to which she is indebted for existence. If we think upon the Pharaohs, the Hamans, the Sennacheribs, the Antiochuses, the Dioclesians, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, that have opened their mouths like dragons to swallow up the people of God, will we not see good reason still to sing that song of ancient times? "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say; many a time have they afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me."

Haman was the cause of much terror to the Jews, but this terror ended in triumphs and joyful feasts. Unhappy are the enemies of the people of God. They

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They labour for the profit of those whom they hate. Amongst those things that are made subservient to the advantage of the people of God, are to be ranked all the devices of their most malicious enemies, Satan himself, their greatest enemy, not excepted. Sennacherib was a tremendous enemy of Judah, and struck terror into the minds of the most valiant of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. But what was the event of his formidable invasion? Disgrace and ruin to himself, gladness and joyful feasts to the Jews; as Isaiah foretold, when he was marching along in all the pride of his heart at the head of his innumerable army, collected from his extended dominions: "They had a song, as in the night, when an holy assembly is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel."

VER. 25.—*But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.*

In Mordecai's letters, he puts the Jews in mind, not only of Haman's plot against them, but of the means also by which it was disconcerted. Let us observe and call to mind the procedure of the providence of God in the works which he accomplishes for his church, or for ourselves in particular. Every step of his goings of majesty deserves to be remarked and admired. They are all beautified with wisdom and grace.

Who could have expected that Esther, whom the king had not desired to see for thirty days, should obtain such favour in his eyes, as to turn his wrath a-

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gainst his favourite Haman, whose face he saw every day with smiles? Yet, when Esther came before the king, the mischief of Haman was turned upon himself, and he and his sons were hanged on the gallows. Let us do our duty, and leave the consequence to God. Without the protection of his providence, Esther would have fallen under the sentence of that cruel law, which made the king inaccessible to his subjects. But her life was preserved by that God to whom she had poured out her soul in fasting. She did great things, and prevailed; and her name shall live to the latest posterity in the records of those heroes and heroines, who "wrought righteousness, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

"Wherever this gospel is preached," said Jesus, "there shall also this that this woman (who poured precious ointment on his head) hath done be told for a memorial of her." Mordecai hoped, that what Esther had done would be told in every succeeding generation to her honour, and for the encouragement of women, as well as men, to do every thing in their power to promote the interests of the church. Women are too ready to say, What can we do to serve the public interest? our mode of life confines us to our own families. But Esther is not the only woman that has gained just praises by her public spirit. Lemuel's mother taught her son to be a blessing to his people, and has left lessons behind her, by which women, to the end of the world, will be taught to excel in virtue. To Priscilla, as well as to Aquila, all the churches of the Gentiles gave thanks for what

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she did for Paul; and many of them had reason to thank her for what she did to Apollos likewise. Males and females are one in Christ Jesus. They are equally saved by his grace; they are equally obliged to promote his interest in the exercise of virtue, and the practice of duties suited to their respective situations; and women, as well as men, have sometimes found singular opportunities of service to their generation, which they could not safely neglect to improve.

VER. 26.—*Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur :—*

The very name of these days afforded an useful lesson to the people of God, and might have afforded an useful lesson to their enemies. It appeared from the event of the lots which gave name to this day, that although time and chance happen to all men, yet nothing is contingent to God. Chance is under his management, and those things which to us appear most accidental, are managed by his providence to accomplish his designs of mercy to them that love him, and of vengeance to his enemies. Why, then, should the friends of God give themselves any anxious trouble about the most uncertain events? The whole disposal of the lot is of him. Haman's lots directed his measures to his own destruction, and the salvation of Judah.

Therefore, for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, VER. 27. *The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days, according to their writing,*

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writing, and according to their appointed time, every year.

The Jews, partly induced by Mordecai's letter, and partly by what they had seen and what had happened to them, agreed that the observation of Purim should be considered as an ordinance and a statute in Israel through every generation. They not only engaged for themselves, but for their seed, and all strangers who should join themselves to their nation, to observe this festival.

They did not take more upon themselves than there was a probability of accomplishing, when they engaged that it should not fail. When a joyful festival is appointed by the rulers, with the chearful consent of the people, to be observed annually, it is not likely to fail amongst posterity, if the occasion of it was some signal revolution in favour of the nation, especially if the very existence of the nation depended upon it.

It may be justly questioned, whether a nation can bind their posterity to any thing further than the laws of religion, justice, and good order in society, bind them. But posterity would not too narrowly inquire how far the authority of their fathers extended, in a matter no less agreeable to themselves than to their progenitors. This, however, is certain, that when men command their children and their seed after them to keep the way of the Lord, future generations cannot turn aside from the good old way of their ancestors, without greatly aggravated guilt *.

The Jews expected that proselytes would observe the festival with no less joy than the posterity of Abraham. If we have joined ourselves to the church, we

* Jer. ii. 10.—13.

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ought to consider ourselves as deeply interested in all the ancient as well as the later dealings of God with her. We partake of the root and fatness of the olive, and therefore ought to bless God for all the care he hath taken of this tree of righteousness, which by his goodness has been so long preserved from destruction, and made to flourish in beauty, and abound in branches and fruit.

VER. 28.—*And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.*

Not only did the Jews resolve and promise to observe these days, but they did every thing in their power to promote the observance of them in every province and city where any of their brethren dwelt, and to perpetuate the observance of them among their seed. Such was the pleasure they felt for their deliverance, and such their gratitude to God their deliverer, that they wished all their brethren, wherever they were scattered, to rejoice with them, and to magnify the Lord together. Their posterity, to the latest generation, could not fail, they thought, whilst these days were observed, to admire, to praise, to glorify, the God of their fathers, their King of old, by whom manifold salvations had been wrought in the midst of the earth. They would, whilst this deliverance was recent, be disposed to think that none of the ancient salvations was more worthy of remembrance; and that as they had no authority to appoint any religious festival for the commemoration of it, they could not do less than concur in the appointment of

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of a common festival, which would annually recal it to mind.

VER. 29.—*Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim.*

Far be it from us to suppose, that either Esther or Mordecai had their own glory in view, when they were at such pains to promote and perpetuate the observance of the feast of Purim. It would be unjust, as well as uncharitable, to ascribe such selfish intentions to persons who had laid down their necks for the honour of their God, and for the deliverance of their people.

That their design was good in writing the second letter of Purim with all authority, cannot be reasonably doubted. It may, indeed, admit of question, whether they did not expect more than prudence could justify them in expecting, from the perpetual observance of this feast. They probably thought, that whilst the memory of the wonders of the month of Adar continued, all posterity would abound in thanksgivings to God. The reverse has been the case. The feast of Purim has long since been turned into a drunken revel. The blinded Jews, it is said, lay it down as a maxim, That they ought to be drunken with wine in remembrance of Esther's banquet. How strange is it for human creatures to think that they are delivered to work abomination!

Esther and Mordecai "wrote with all authority." They thought that they could not use their power for a better purpose, than to perpetuate the remembrance of that day when God delivered their souls from death, their eyes from tears, and their feet from fall-

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ing. But in the exercise of their authority, they forgot not that kindness which was due to their brethren, the Israel of God.

VER. 30.—*And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth.*

When we are exalted above our brethren, we are too ready to forget both them and ourselves, as if the change of our condition had raised us to a higher rank of creatures. Mordecai and his adopted daughter, were not negligent in the exercise of their authority, for purposes that appeared to them good and salutary to the nation; but they still retained their humbleness of mind, and their kind affections to their kindred. They sent these letters to all the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, "with words of truth and peace," with expressions of the warmest benevolence. Nor were these expressions, like many of our mutual compliments, merely dictated by a politeness which too often conceals a perfect indifference to our neighbour's welfare under good words and fair speeches. Their words were words of truth, as well as of peace, when they expressed their desires and prayers, that the Lord might bless his people with peace.

Let men maintain that authority which God hath given them, that they may attain the ends for which it is given them; but let it be always tempered with charity and gentleness. Paul, in his epistles, asserts his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ; but he writes with words of peace and truth, when he prays for grace and peace to the churches from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

VER. 31.—*To confirm these days of Purim in their times*

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times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves, and for their seed, the matters of their fastings and their cry.

At the motion of Mordecai, the Jews were unanimously determined to observe the festival, and to enjoin the observance of it to their posterity. The Jews were confirmed in their resolution by the second letter of Mordecai, in conjunction with Esther. And one consideration which would dispose them to observe the commemoration of this deliverance with joy and exultation, was, that they had fasted and cried for it under the pressure of the danger. They could not eat their ordinary food. They cried out with exceeding loud and bitter cries. They fasted and cried unto the Lord, and he heard the voice of their supplications.

Spring is the pleasantest season of the year, because it follows the dreary desolations, and the piercing cold of winter. These days of health are especially delightful which follow days of extreme sickness, when we had the sentence of death in ourselves. Remember the dismal thoughts that engrossed your minds, the terrifying apprehensions that embittered your troubles, and the exquisite felicity which you promised to yourselves, if it should please God, beyond your expectations, to send you relief. Thus will the troubles you have endured spread happiness in the retrospect over the remaining part of your life. You still must meet with trials; but you will be thankful that they are so light and easy to be borne, when they are compared with those which you have formerly endured.

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Have you fasted and cried unto the Lord, and has he graciously inclined his ear to your complaints? With what joy and peace ought you to recollect the mercy which has preserved you from going down to the chambers of the grave, perhaps to the regions of destruction! David will teach you what improvement to make of your fasting and cries, when the Lord has been pleased to grant you the deliverance which you supplicated: "I love the Lord, because he heard my voice and supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him so long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living *."

VER. 32.—*And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.*

The high and beloved name of Esther was sufficient to establish the decree of Purim. She had been the saviour of the Jews. At the risk of her life, she had preserved theirs. What do we not owe to him who, not merely by endangering his life, but by giving up himself to an accursed death, hath delivered us from the wrath to come?

"And it was written in the book" of the Jewish institutions, or in the register of the Jewish transactions. Books are necessary for recording those things that are intended

* Psal. cxvi. 1.—7. & 9. Psal. xviii. & xxx. Isa. xxxviii. 11.—20.

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intended for the use of posterity. Were it not for books, we would all be children in understanding. Let us carefully improve those things that were written aforetimes for our learning, especially those things which divine wisdom hath directed the holy men of God to record for our benefit.

The feast of Purim is still observed, though not in a manner agreeable to Esther's intention. The observance of this and other festivals of the Jews, from the most ancient times, is attended with this great advantage, that it affords a convincing argument of the truth of those facts which they were designed to commemorate, when we take this into the account, that these fasts were recorded in books at the time when they were instituted, which are still extant. The observance of the ancient Jewish feasts is a public declaration of their firm belief of the Old-Testament scriptures. This is one of the most powerful rational arguments of the truth of our holy religion. If the Old-Testament scriptures are true, the Messiah expected by the Jews is come long ago into the world; and none but Jesus of Nazareth can be that Messiah. Thus the most determined enemies of Jesus give a decided, though indirect testimony, that he is the Son of God, by attesting the truth and divine authority of those ancient scriptures that testify of him.

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DISCOURSE XVI.

GREATNESS OF AHASUERUS. CHARACTER AND GRANDEUR OF MORDECAI. CHAP. X.

VER. 1.—*And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea.*

Too many subjects are disgusted with the governments under which they live, when new taxes are imposed. Here we find, that the increase of taxes is no new thing, and that it may be necessary under the best and wisest governments. When the tribute here spoken of was laid upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea, Ahasuerus had his counsels directed, not by Haman, but by Mordecai. Ahasuerus might perhaps have saved his subjects their new burdens, if he had been more frugal in his expences. The multitude of his concubines must have put him to a very great, and a worse than needless expence *. He was liberal in his donations. His wars could not be carried on without great sums; and when his wars with the Greeks came to an end, he expended much money in

* Chap. ii.

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in political intrigues, to preserve himself from more wars. He therefore found it necessary to lay new burdens upon his subjects. But the protection which government affords makes the payment of necessary taxes an act of justice. "Rulers are the ministers of God to us for good; and for this cause we must pay them tribute, because they are the servants of God, waiting continually upon this very thing." We are not excused from this duty by the supposition that government ought to be more œconomical than it is. Who of us does not sometimes spend money that might be spared? It is one of the laws of the Turkish empire, that no new tributes can be imposed on the people. The consequence is, that when their government must have money, it must be raised by oppression of individuals, who, in their turn, indemnify themselves by oppressing others. The Persians were much more wise, when they allowed a tribute to be laid upon them, which came with equal weight upon all. "He laid a tribute upon the land," upon the vast regions on the continent under the Persian empire, and upon the many isles of the sea which they possessed. A burden borne by all will be light, when it would be unsupportable to a few.

Subjects may, under unwise governors, have too much reason to complain of burdens laid upon them *, yet complaints of this kind are often without ground. Rulers can best know what sums are requisite for the honourable support of government, and for the defence of the country. Although we think our burdens heavy, let us bear them conscientiously. We claim

* Prov. xxviii. 16.

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claim support to our just rights from government, and must not defraud it of its own rights *.

VER. 2.—*And all the acts of his power, and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?*

The Bible is incomparably the best of all books, and yet it is not the only book from which we may derive instruction. Luther wished all his books might be burnt, rather than men should be kept by them from reading the scriptures. But we may daily read the scriptures, and find some time likewise for consulting other books. We find the apostle Paul quoting the books of poets and philosophers †. Here the inspired writer refers to the chronicles of Media and Persia for a farther account of the power and greatness of Ahasuerus; and for a confirmation of what has been said of the greatnese of Mordecai. We are often referred by the sacred writers to uninspired histories for larger accounts than they were directed to give us of the lives of persons eminent for their stations, and for their virtues and vices. Much useful instruction is to be drawn from credible histories. We learn from them many of the works that God has done on the earth, and the perfect conformity between his words and works. Many examples of goodness are set before us, which we ought to imitate; many instances of vicious conduct, which we ought to abhor.

The registers of the ancient kings of Persia do not now

* Rom. xiii. 6. 7. † Acts, xvii. Titus, i. 12. 1 Cor. xv. 33.

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now exist; but the reference made to them is a confirmation of the history of this book. The writer would not have sent his contemporaries to the public records for further information, if he had written any thing which did not agree with them. Learned men have made a happy use of ancient writings of heathens, as well as of Christians, to establish the authority and truth of scripture, in opposition to infidels.

Although the records of the Persian kings are lost, we have books left us which inform us of the greatness, and power, and long reign of Artaxerxes, or Ahasuerus, the husband of Esther. Many worthy deeds were done by him to the church of God, as we are informed by Ezra and Nehemiah; and he was well rewarded by Divine Providence. The prayers of the people of God for his prosperity were heard.

Although we have no account of Mordecai in the Grecian histories of this long reign, we have no reason to doubt of what is said concerning him in this book. The Greeks had but a partial acquaintance with the affairs of the Persian court; and the most ancient Persian histories, written by Persians themselves, give some cause to suspect, that through ignorance or partiality the Greeks have frequently omitted or misrepresented the most important facts. Mordecai the Jew, and Ezra, and Nehemiah, had access to the knowledge of many facts concerning the government of Ahasuerus, that were unknown to strangers.

VER. 3.—*For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and acc[illegible]*

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the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

"Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus." This was wonderful; a poor man of the dispersion of Israel was raised high in dignity, by the favour of Ahasuerus, above all the princes of Persia. The elevation of men from the lowest to the highest rank is not unusual in the east, even at present. But Mordecai professed a religion which seemed an unsurmountable obstruction to grandeur in a land of heathens; and he held it so firm, that he would not conform to the fashions of the court in any thing that did not consist with a good conscience. Haman hoped that all the men whose laws and customs were so different from the king's laws would soon be extirpated. He little expected that one of the most inflexible adherents to those laws and customs would supplant and succeed him in the king's favour. "There be many that seek the ruler's favour" with such eagerness, that they will bend their consciences into a ready compliance with his wishes, whatever they are; "but every man's judgement cometh from the Lord." He exalted Daniel and Mordecai in the courts of Babylon and Shushan; and these were men that would not have turned a hair-breadth out of the path of duty to please any prince on earth. Their unshaken firmness might very probably be one cause of their advancement. Inflexibility in what is right must be a respectable quality in the eyes, not only of the good, but of every man of sense.

Ahasuerus showered favours upon Esther, upon Mordecai, upon Ezra, and upon Nehemiah, and yet continued all his days to adhere to the religion of his fathers.

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fathers. Herod Antipas did many things gladly because of John Baptist, and yet he was not a good man. Love to the brethren is a scriptural mark of a saint; but men that are not saints may have a warm attachment to good men, on account of qualities that all the world hold in esteem. We love the brethren, when we love believers as the children of God, as our brethren in Christ, partakers of the same divine nature. But integrity, generosity, unshaken constancy in virtue, are qualities for which men that have not passed from death to life may esteem and love their neighbours, whether they are saints or not.

"Mordecai was great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren." They venerated and loved him as the saviour of their nation, as their father and protector. Envy too often attends the exaltation of one's equals. Joseph's brethren would rather murder him, or sell him to strangers, than see him advanced above themselves. Ingratitude too often follows the greatest benefactions. The children of Israel requited evil to the house of Gideon for the deliverance wrought for them from the hands of the Midianites, at the risk of his life. But Mordecai met with returns of the sincerest gratitude from the multitude of his brethren. He still behaved to them as a brother, and they considered him both as their brother and their prince.

It was a great happiness to the good man that he was accepted of the multitude of his brethren; for "a good name is better than precious ointment, and loving favour is rather to be chosen than silver and gold." This, however, is a happiness not always to be expected by good men; and therefore, as our Lord teaches

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teaches us, we must learn to do good without the expectation of a return from those to whom we do it. Paul was still happier than Mordecai, when he found ungrateful returns for the noblest services, and yet could say in sincerity, "I am ready to spend and be spent for you, although the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." If we do not perform our good works to be seen of men, we will be content with the honour that comes from God only. The favour and gratitude of men are highly useful, by enabling us to be still more useful to them; but then we have the testimony of our own hearts, that our works are wrought in God, when the course of our goodness is not interrupted by bad returns from its objects *.

"Seeking the wealth of his people." Many, when they have attained the utmost summit of their wishes, become unhappy, because they have obtained what they sought. Desire faileth, and their hearts become like a stone in them, because they have nothing more to desire. This is the effect of selfishness reigning in the heart. Give a good man ten times more wealth or honour than he ever desired to possess, he is not unhappy because his wishes are completely gratified, for he will still find new desires operating in his heart. Although he has nothing more to wish for on his own account, he finds opportunities to do much good to others, which he did not formerly enjoy. His desires are roused by the means of executing them. Mordecai was, doubtless, richer than he ever expected to be, when he was made the queen's treasurer, and the king's favourite. But there was a nation in which

* Heb. vi. 9. 10. Gal. vi. 12.—16.

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which he was deeply interested, and which he had new opportunities given him to serve. These opportunities he did not neglect. Whilst he faithfully served a prince to whom he was highly indebted, he sought, and by all wise and honest means promoted, the wealth and prosperity of his people. A rare talent was entrusted to him, and he did not hide it in a napkin. When we have nothing to do for ourselves, it will be our wisdom and happiness to do much for others. "The liberal man deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand."

The Jews were Mordecai's people. This was one, though not the chief, reason why he sought their wealth. Patriotism is certainly a virtue recommended to us by the best of saints. The apostle Paul was perhaps worse treated by his countrymen than ever any other man, and yet he would willingly have died for them a thousand deaths. He magnified his office as the apostle of the Gentiles, that if, by any means, he might stir up to emulation his brethren according to the flesh.

Paul could not procure the love of his kinsmen, like Mordecai, although he certainly sought the welfare of his people with an affection no less ardent. The reason of the difference may be, that Mordecai sought their outward prosperity, and Paul their spiritual advantage. We are not to suppose that Mordecai was careless about their spiritual interests. That expression which we translate "the wealth," might have been rendered "the good" of his people. He sought their happiness of every kind. But his station gave him opportunities chiefly to promote their external prosperity. Paul laboured for their spiritual ad-

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vantage; and we know what difference men put between services done to their bodies and services done to their souls. If the preachers of the gospel, who call men to come and share in the unsearchable riches of Christ, should call them to come and receive thousands of gold and silver, not one of them would hear the invitation without a thankful compliance; and yet they will not come unto Christ, that they might have life. Alas! how little regard is paid to the words of the Wisdom of God: "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it *."

"And speaking peace to all his seed." The generous soul of this good man was filled with kindness to the rising race, and projected the happiness of succeeding generations. "He spake peace to all his seed," (or rather, their seed). He was courteous in his deportment to the young, and behaved so as to discover a warm regard for the welfare and happiness of the race that should be born. Thus Peter, in the view of laying aside his earthly tabernacle, took care that Christians should have necessary truths in remembrance, when they could not enjoy the opportunity of hearing them from his mouth.

The expression seems to imply, that Mordecai procured the peace of the seed of Israel by the words of his mouth. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Mordecai, by his credit with the king, gave him a favourable opinion of the Jews, and extinguished all suspicion that might be entertained by that prince

* Prov. viii. 10. 11.

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prince to the prejudice of a nation, whose laws were different from the laws of other people; and, by his influence with the Jews, promoted that spirit of loyalty and good behaviour on which their welfare greatly depended.

Few have it in their power to be such benefactors as Mordecai; all have it in their power to do much hurt; and who has it not in his power to do some good? We are not required to do what we have it not in our power to do, or what is not competent to our station. But all of us are bound to live under the influence of those tempers which were eminently displayed in those great saints whose examples are recorded in the Bible. They obtained their good report through faith, which animated them in all their undertakings. If we live by the faith of Christ, we will be active according to the ability that God gives us, and the calls of his providence, in promoting his glory, and the best interests of men.

Fervent charity operated in Mordecai; and if our faith is genuine, it will work by love. Love is not a dead, but a vigorous affection. If the spirit of love and faith dwell in us, we will be trees of righteousness, whose leaves will not wither, and whose fruit will be produced in its proper season; for "the fruit of the righteous is the fruit of a tree of life."

If we cannot reasonably hope to do much for posterity, we certainly may do something to promote the welfare of our own generation. If our goodness extend not far, it may reach to parents, servants, wives, neighbours. Our dutiful behaviour towards them, our example, our prayers, may greatly promote their present comfort, and their eternal welfare.

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And why may not the most inconsiderable Christian hope to be of some use to posterity? Train up your children in the fear of God, and they will be a blessing to the next age. They will probably follow your good example, and thus you will be useful, by their means, to generations yet unborn. If you have no children, you may be useful to young persons around you: "A word spoken in season, how good is it!"

SER-

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SERMONS

ON

PARENTAL DUTIES.

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SERMON I.

THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.

EPH. vi. 4.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

IT is a common, and a too just complaint, that religion is in a less prosperous state amongst us, than it was forty or fifty years ago. What is the cause of this unhappy change? The Spirit of God is the only author of true holiness. Why hath God withdrawn his Spirit from us? It is certainly owing to ourselves that he testifies his displeasure by with-holding, in a great measure, those gracious influences which were communicated to our fathers. "The Lord is with you," said the prophet Azariah, the son of Oded, "while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."

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It is owing, say some, to the difference between the ministers of former and present times, that the means of grace appear to produce so little effect upon men. And we do not deny that our hands are in the trespass. Our spirits are not animated with the same sacred fervour in the work of the Lord, as those of many of our fathers; and the Spirit of God does not crown our labours with success like theirs. But it will not be equitable to lay the whole blame upon us. "Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord our God?" and such sins as provoke the Holy Spirit to testify his displeasure by with-holding that gracious influence, without which we must continue in our present melancholy condition? When ministers do not make full proof of their ministry, can they hope to save themselves and those that hear them? When professors of religion do not use, or use as if they used not, the means of grace, can they wonder that the Holy Spirit does not bless these means to their souls? When parents do not follow the instructions of the Holy Spirit, requiring them to train up their children in the way wherein they should go, have they any reason to be surprised when their children are left by God to walk in the way of their own hearts, and after the sight of their own eyes? When means by which the Spirit uses to work, means prescribed by the Spirit himself, means for obtaining the most precious blessings, means which he has encouraged us, by great and precious promises, to use with diligence; when such means are either not used at all, or when they are used with such carelessness as makes it apparent that we pay little regard to the authority of God, place little confidence in

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in his promises, and give ourselves little trouble whether we enjoy his influence or not, the Spirit himself is despised and grieved, and justly provoked to leave us to ourselves, that we may know, by sad experience, how little we can do, either for ourselves, or for those that are dear to us.

It cannot be reasonably expected, that great benefit can be derived from sermons, by men who understand little of what is said to them. And much cannot be understood by persons uninstructed in the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, which ought to be taught by parents to their children, in the years of childhood. It is only once or twice in the course of a year, that we can give private instructions to your children; and therefore it is impossible for us to prepare their minds for our public instructions. This is the work chiefly of parents, who are commanded to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If you neglect this part of your duty, we justly impute to you a great part of the blame of the unsuccessfulness of our ministry. When men hear the word, and understand it not, the devil commonly finds it easy to steal away from them that little of which they may form some apprehension. But how can they understand sermons, if they have not been taught their catechisms? Do you expect that the teachers of your schools can make your children to read words, and sentences, and discourses, before they have been taught the letters of the alphabet? As little can it be expected that sermons should be understood by those who have not learned the first lessons of religion.

That other sermons may be better understood, I shall

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shall endeavour in this discourse to persuade you, if possible, to train up your children in the way wherein they should go: and for this purpose I shall endeavour to explain and enforce,

I. The caution given to parents against provoking their children to wrath.

II. The direction given them to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. After which, I shall,

III. Consider why the caution against provoking your children to wrath is joined to the command to bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

I. I SHALL endeavour to explain and enforce the caution against provoking your children to wrath.

Perhaps you will say, that you love your children, and therefore scarcely need to have this caution explained to you. You would be sorrow to see your children causelessly provoked to wrath by any person whatever, and therefore are not likely to provoke them by any part of your own conduct.

I doubt not but you love your children; but you may nevertheless need a warning against harsh behaviour towards them. Is it not too well known, that wives and husbands will sometimes make one another very uneasy, by harsh behaviour, or by provoking language; and yet if a third person interpose to terminate the difference, they will both turn against him, in defence of either of the parties? This is a plain evidence that love does not always ensure good behaviour to the object of it. They love one another too well to endure any harsh word from a third person

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to either of them; and yet their love does not hinder them from plaguing one another with rude behaviour. Discretion is necessary, as well as love, to preserve you from making your wives or your children unhappy by your conduct.

Suffer me, then, to speak a few words to you concerning that behaviour which your children have a right to expect from you. We have heard of books about the rights of men, and the rights of women. The rights of children, too, deserve our consideration. They are human creatures, made after the image of God. "Of such is the kingdom of God." They are not able to plead their rights against tyrannical parents. Suffer me to plead on their behalf. I do not say that any of you are tyrants in your families. But all of you have much power over your children; and such is the present state of human nature, that there are few who do not, on some occasion or other, make a wrong use of their power. David himself, on some occasions, made a rash and unwarrantable use of that regal power which God gave him over Israel. Can you say that you are chargeable with fewer errors in the use of your parental power? If you are, you may, however, need to be warned against abuses of authority, to which you may be prompted by temptations not yet experienced.

1. *Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,* by austerity, or rudeness in your behaviour to your children.

Some seem to think, that, in all places except their own houses, they are bound to behave with gentleness and good manners. I am fully persuaded, not only that they err in making this exception, but that

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this mistake is the source of a great part of the misery of human life, and of a great part of those iniquities whereby men are offended, and whereby God is dishonoured.

"Whosoever is angry with his brother without cause, shall be in danger of the judgement; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire." Will you say that you are not, in the sight of God, the brethren, but the fathers of your children? But, although you are their fathers, you are the children of the same God, who made both you and them. You are redeemed by the same precious blood. And because you are their fathers, to transgress any of the laws of love in your behaviour to them, is a greater iniquity than a like transgression in your behaviour to other persons. The more nearly we are related to any of the human race, the greater are our obligations to perform to them all the numerous duties comprehended in the royal law of love; and the greater is the guilt which we contract, by doing any of those things which are forbidden in this law.

Some parents will not scruple to call their children idiots, brutes, blockheads, asses. Is not this as bad as to say unto them, Raca, or, Thou rebel, (for so it is probable the word rendered, *Thou fool*, signifies)? Would you take it well if any other person should call them by such names? But why should you take those freedoms, which you will not allow to other people? You are their fathers, you say, and have rights over them which none else have. This is true. But what are these rights? Have you a

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right to treat them with indignity and outrage, because you are connected with them by a relation which binds you to love them with a tender affection? Because you are obliged to do them much good, have you a right to do them hurt? Parents have surely as little right, and less if possible, to be injurious to their own children, than any other persons living.

But they have provoked you by bad behaviour? Well; admonish and chastise them, and teach them to behave better. But if you treat them with rudeness, you teach them to behave worse. If you call them bad names, you teach them to give the same, or as bad names, to any persons that happen to displease them. Will you chastise them for calling their brothers or sisters, or any other persons, brutes or blockheads? You are blameable to an high degree, if you do not. You are blameable to as high a degree, if you punish them for imitating your own conduct, unless you, at the same time, make them sensible that you abhor yourselves for having taught them such lessons.

What do you think of Saul's behaviour to his son Jonathan, when he said to him in his wrath, "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman," ('Thou son of harlots,' as the most ancient translators understand it), "Do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and to the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?" How different from such language was that of Abraham to his son Isaac; of Isaac to his sons Esau and Jacob; of David to his son Solomon! Gen. xxiii. xxvii. xxviii. 1 Chron. xxii. But we scarcely need such examples to teach us that gentleness of behaviour which parents owe to their children.

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dren. Nature itself taught the heathens, who knew not God, that a man who is surly in his behaviour to his children deserves not the honourable name of a father *.

Parents, even when they justly correct their children, ought by no means to treat them with proud disdain, or to load them with opprobrious epithets. What would be thought of a judge who should load a criminal with insult at the time he is pronouncing sentence upon him? Fierce passions are never worse timed than when a judge gives sentence on a pannel, or a father corrects his child. Correction of children, and the punishment of criminals, are divine institutions, which ought to be administered with all gravity, and with perfect calmness of temper.

Correction, as well as punishment, ought to be proportioned to the fault, or the crime. And whatever the fault or the crime is, it must be remembered, that the offender hath the honour to be a human creature, and must not be treated as a brute. Do you not remember the law of Moses concerning stripes? Whatever the offence was, the offender was not to receive more than forty; "lest," says the divine Lawgiver, "thy brother should appear vile unto thee." He is still thy brother, whatever he has done. Thou must still respect him as a brother, and beware of loading him with ignominy, when necessity requires that he should be punished. This humane law was so strictly observed by the Jews, even in their worst degeneracy, that though they accounted Paul the most execrable

* Πατηρ ὁς ἠπιος ἠν. This is a part of the character which Homer gives to one of his most distinguished heroes: "He was mild as a father."

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execrable of men, and often punished him with stripes, they never inflicted upon him the full number of forty. Shall the spirit of this law be less regarded by Christian parents, than the letter of it by Jewish persecutors?

2. Parents must not provoke their children to wrath by injustice, or unkindness, in with-holding from them what they have good reason to expect from the affection of a father.

Those men who are the instruments of being to their fellow-creatures, are bound to protect and cherish their tender years, and to provide whatever is necessary for them, till they are in a condition to provide for themselves. If children find themselves left destitute of needful provision and support, by the idleness, the prodigality, or avarice of their parents, they must be tempted to complain and fret at such barbarous usage, when they come to those years at which they can form a judgement of the cause of their distress; and these years sooner arrive than some parents suppose. If a man provide not for those of his own house, he is worse than the infidels. He has less understanding than the beasts of the field, or than the fowls of heaven, except the ostrich.

Children have a right to expect from their parents food and clothing suited to their circumstances, together with such other comforts and conveniences as are generally enjoyed by the children of parents of equal rank; and, therefore, parents tempt their children to be angry with them, when they are compelled, by excessive frugality on the part of their fathers, to blush and hide their heads at their own mean appearance, in the presence of young persons whose parents

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parents are not richer than their own, nor disposed to throw away their money on superfluities.

I am speaking to parents only, and not to children, nor to other people, who have no right to judge of the behaviour of parents to their children, and who, if they judge at all, must judge without proper evidence. I said, that parents ought to make such allowances of necessaries or conveniencies to their children as their income will permit, not such as their station, in common estimation, may seem to require. To proportion men's expences to their station, rather than their income, is one of the greatest follies in the world. It is the cause of continual misery to many of mankind, and leads to much wickedness. Now, parents are the only good judges of their own circumstances, which are but very imperfectly known to their neighbours, and perhaps still more imperfectly to their own children. You are not, therefore, young persons, to give ear to those impertinent meddlers in other people's affairs, who tell you that your parents are not generous in their behaviour to you. I have given to your parents my advice to treat you with that justice and generosity, which may be expected from their affection to the fruit of their own bodies. But both you and I must leave the application of this instruction to their own prudence. We have no right, nor have we that knowledge of their situation which might enable us to mention particulars. It is very possible that some of your parents may carry their frugality too far in the allowance they make you; but you have no right to think that they do so, or to believe them who tell you so, unless better

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proof could be given of it than can be commonly had.

Although parents may be in circumstances which render it difficult for them, they ought not to withhold from their children, grown up to proper age, the necessary means of enabling them to provide for themselves, by acquiring skill in some profession suited to their genius and their inclination. If industry is required from all men, it must be incumbent on parents to do what lies in their power to qualify their children for some kind of industry that may be useful to themselves, and to the public. Amongst one of the wisest nations of antiquity, it was a law, that the man who did not cause his children to be taught some useful profession, should have no claim upon them for support, when himself became infirm through sickness or old age. I do not commend this law. It would not become Christians to act according to its spirit towards their parents. What I infer from it is, that parents, in the estimation of the wise, act unjustly to their children, and tempt them to give place to resentment against the instruments of their own being, when they grudge the expence and trouble necessary to prepare their children for making that figure in the world, which might be expected from the station and circumstances of their parents.

3. Partiality in behaviour to children is certainly unjustifiable in parents.

But let me not be mistaken. I do not say that parents ought either to love all their children equally, or to affect the appearance of an equal love to them all. Who will say that Jacob sinned in loving Joseph more than his brethren, when Joseph so well deserved

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to be loved above them all? And yet it will not be easy to free him from the charge of indiscretion, in distinguishing him so remarkably by singular testimonies of his love, when he might have been so justly apprehensive of some bad effects from it, considering what he knew of the haughty and passionate temper of some of his other sons, Gen. xxxvii.

Parents are not to be blamed for distinguishing, by the tenderness of their love, such of their children as need, above others, parental pity to soothe them under infirmities or misfortunes. God is pleased to illustrate the tenderness of his mercy to his people, by the pity of a father or a mother to their distressed offspring, Psal. ciii. 13. Isa. lxvi. 13.

Parents are not unjust in giving peculiar marks of their affection to those children who have merited it by their piety, their prudence, the sweetness of their tempers, their industry in acquiring useful accomplishments, their virtuous actions, their attachment to their parents, their kindness to their brethren and sisters, their discreet and kind behaviour to friends or strangers. "A wise son maketh a glad father;" why may he not express his gladness? Can any child of the family, who has not merited such regard, take it amiss that he should? Such a child must not only be destitute of wisdom, but blind to its beauties; and there is no hope, without a miracle of grace, that a regard either to God or man will ever make him wiser than he is.

But parents provoke their children to wrath, when they hate some, and love others of them, though their children have given them no reason to make this invidious distinction; or when they make a difference between

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tween them, far exceeding the causes that have been given. Distinctions founded in reason and religion may be attended with good effects. They are just encouragements to virtue, piety, and dutiful behaviour, on the one side; on the other side, they are discouragements to sin and folly. But distinctions that are arbitrary and capricious can do no good, and will probably do much evil. Your favourite child, we hope, will not be cast into a deep pit, or sold into Egypt by his brethren; but, what is worse for him, he may be swelled with vanity and arrogance; he may learn to despise his brethren, and even to treat with insolence the father that cannot prevail upon himself to find fault with any thing that he does. You may, besides, draw upon him the envy of his brethren, which will more than counterbalance all the fruits of your partial favour. Had not the Lord been on Joseph's side, and turned all his calamities into blessings, the envy of his brethren, although they had neither killed nor sold him, would have done him more hurt, and given him more pain, than his father's partiality could have given him pleasure.

There is the more need of warning parents against groundless partialities to their children, that we find the best men too much disposed to indulge them, and the wisest men too little sensible of the mischiefs that may be produced by them. Who would have thought that Isaac would love Esau better than Jacob, when a divine oracle had declared, that the elder should serve the younger? especially after the plain proofs which Jacob, no doubt, gave of his piety, whilst he was yet in his father's house. And little did Isaac think, whilst he was indulging his ill-judged partiality,

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lity, that he was tempting his beloved Rebekah to impose a cheat upon himself, in conjunction with the best of his sons, or that he was sowing the seeds of a bloody dissension amongst his children, and his children's children to many generations. That behaviour of Jacob, which gave rise to an anger that did tear perpetually, and to wrath which was kept for ever, took its rise in part from Isaac's unjust design to give the blessing to his eldest son, who had already forfeited the birth-right by his profane conduct, and who was never entitled to the blessing.

Partiality in distributing the possessions or goods of the father amongst his children, is inconsistent with justice. We do not deny that parents may justly give much more to one child of the family than to another; nor are they bound to account to strangers for the preference. But a great inequality, without any other reason but the will of the father, cannot be justified. Why should all his children but one be left beggars, for the sake of a favourite? Are they not all equally related to him? Have they not all their virtues and their faults? If some have distinguished themselves by their virtues, or by their faults, it will not be unjust to make them sensible of their father's sense of their conduct. Jacob was not to be blamed, but commended, for leaving the double portion to Joseph. He was, indeed, guided by the Spirit of God, in giving this instance of regard to that son who was the shepherd and the stone of Israel, and in the dissatisfaction he expressed with the conduct of his three eldest sons, in the farewell blessings given to his family. But many parents, by their last settlement, appear to be actuated by the spirit of the world, which

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which prompts them to rob all their younger children, to enable the eldest to keep up the honour of the family.

Why should daughters have a trifle left them, when perhaps all the sons have a rich provision, though daughters have not the same means in their power which the sons have to improve their condition? Daughters are often found to love their father better than his sons, and are less likely to squander away the fruits of his goodness. When partiality in their father deprives them of what they had reason to expect, are they not tempted to indulge those sentiments which are the common effects of unrequited affection?

The offspring of first marriages have sometimes been deprived of their rights, to gratify a second wife. But why should the dead be injured for the sake of the living? Your deceased friends may be still wronged or favoured in the persons of their living representatives. If you loved your wife while she lived, she has done nothing since she was taken from you to merit what is no less unjustifiable than an alienation of your regard. But, if you did not love her so well as you do the present, her children are still entitled to justice from their father. The law of Moses absolutely prohibited the Jews from making the son of a beloved wife the heir of the double portion, instead of the son of a wife that was hated. I do not say that this law binds us in the letter of it; but it certainly teaches us, that it is injustice in parents to prefer some of their children to others, equally deserving of regard, from a partial attachment to their mother.

4. Children

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4. Children must not be provoked to wrath by violence done to their consciences.

Conscience must be regulated by knowledge and judgement. Till knowledge is gained by enlightening the consciences of young persons, parents certainly have a right to direct their religious behaviour; and it is the duty of parents to afford them all the means in their power, to enable them to form a judgement for themselves, and to endeavour to convince them of the truth and importance of those doctrines which appear to themselves to be founded in the Bible. But they must by no means claim any powers which can belong to none but the Lord of conscience, the Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.

Amongst the different forms of religious profession, which are too numerous amongst us, you no doubt believe your own to be the best. I believe so too. We would deserve damnation for our hypocrisy, if we solemnly professed a belief of any religious principles, which did not appear to us to be agreeable to the mind of God. And therefore it must be very desirable to us, that our children should make the same profession, if they can view the truths of religion in the same light with ourselves. If they cannot be convinced by our arguments, or their own inquiries, that we are in the right, we must not be displeased with them, because they dissent from us. The rights of conscience are sacred. We step into the throne of God, and claim honours equal to his, if we require even our own children to make a profession of religion which pleases ourselves, rather than a profession which appears to them to please God.

What advantage can we propose by urging them to

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to associate in church-fellowship with that body of Christians with which we are connected, unless we can convince them that our particular form of profession is warranted by scripture? We may make them hypocrites, but cannot make them believers; and it is of little importance what profession they make, or whether they make any at all, if they are, in their profession, dissemblers with God. I should rather have said, that it were better for them entirely to lay aside all profession of religion, than to profess before God what they do not believe with their hearts. Wretched and wicked are the men who make no pretensions to any religion, but not so wretched and wicked as those men who wilfully compass God about with lies and deceits, as all those men do who profess, before God, any thing which they do not believe.

I am far from meaning, by any thing I have said, that it is not a matter of importance in religion, to be stedfast in that form of profession which we think it our duty, upon proper examination, to make. We must first prove all things, and then hold fast that which is good. But that which is our duty, is the duty of our children also. They ought first to prove, and then to hold fast. To hold fast, without having proved, is behaving neither like Christians, nor like honest men. I greatly dislike the religion of Popery, and yet I think it far better to be a conscientious Papist, than to want honesty; and, amongst all our transactions, honesty is most requisite in our dealings with God. He is the Searcher of hearts, and will not be mocked.

There is, indeed, one piece of deference in religion

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gion due to parents, and they have good reason to be displeased with their children, if it is not paid to them. Children certainly ought to associate in the public exercises of religion with their parents, till they can chuse for themselves what appears to be good. They ought not to desert that profession in which they have been trained up, because it is less fashionable than others, or because it may oblige them to a stricter course of religion, or from any other motives but a persuasion, upon due examination, that some other form of Christian profession is more agreeable to the mind of God. To alter a religious profession, in which young persons have been educated, on any other ground, is not only extremely disrespectful to their parents, but exceedingly offensive to God, and cannot be reconciled with that godly sincerity which is essential to the Christian character.

Parents have undoubtedly a right to deal with their children on this subject, and to learn what are their reasons for joining in a religious communion different from their own. But they ought to make the same allowance for their children that they require for themselves. If their children appear to act from bad motives, or without motives, they should admonish them of the infinite importance of dealing sincerely, and in the exercise of their best judgement, with God, who will bring every work into judgement. But if their children appear to act sincerely, according to the best judgement which they can form, their parents have no right to deprive them of the privileges of children, for differing in sentiment from themselves.

"He that doubteth is damned if he eat; and whatsoever

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soever is not of faith is sin." This maxim is of very comprehensive import, and is no less applicable to our forms of religious profession, than to the disputes which took place in the church of the Romans, when Paul wrote his epistle to them. Most certainly, any part of our religious profession which is not of faith is sin; and it cannot be of faith, unless it is founded upon the word of God, which we all acknowledge to be the rule, and the only rule, of religion. We cannot believe, if the scripture is the rule of faith, that any point of doctrine or practice is an article of religion to be professed and held fast by us, unless we can find it in scripture. That persuasion which depends upon the authority of persons, cannot be any part of that religion which is regulated purely by the word of God. Our fathers may communicate to us what they please of their goods, and may give us good instructions; but they can give us no part of their faith. They may, indeed, persuade us to believe many things upon their authority, and these things may be true and good: but they are no points of faith to us, till we know and believe them upon a higher authority.

On the whole, it is the duty of parents to remember that they once were children themselves, and to govern their sons and daughters with that mildness, and attention to their happiness, with which they wished to be themselves treated in their early years. Childhood and youth, under the direction of good parents, are a happy period of life, perhaps the only happy period which is ever to be enjoyed. Why should young persons be deprived of a happy day, or even a happy hour, but for their greater happiness? All our [illegible]

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nections with one another are intended, by a gracious Providence, to make us happy; and they are perverted and abused, when they are not improved for this purpose. It must not, however, be forgotten, that our happiness in youth or age depends not on unrestrained liberty. If parents wish to see their children happy, let them beware of provoking them needlessly to wrath, lest they be discouraged.

SER-

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SERMON II.

THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.

EPH. vi. 4.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

II. LET parents be careful especially to "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." By "the Lord" we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and the Author of our religion. "The nurture and admonition of the Lord," is that course of discipline and instruction which becomes believers in Christ, which is appointed by Christ, which is well-pleasing to him, which fits young persons to be followers of the Lord, which he is ordinarily pleased to bless, as the means of faith in himself, and of obedience to his laws. More particularly,

1. Educate your children in the knowledge of Christ, and of their duty.

It is a great benefit to us who live in Scotland, that

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we were required, in our younger days, to commit that most excellent of human compositions, the Shorter Catechism, so exactly to memory, that we can scarcely forget the words of it, as long as our memories are able to retain any thing. Be not less careful of the grandchildren of your fathers, than they were of you. See that they learn, and that they remember, the instructions of that book, which contains almost every doctrine and duty of our religion within such a short compass, that it can be bought for one of the smallest of our coins, may be read in half an hour, and may be easily learned by heart in the space of 107 days, although a few minutes only of each day be employed for the purpose.

But the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, are the grounds of our belief of every religious truth; and there is an energy in them which exceeds all human compositions, as much as the sound of thunder exceeds a whisper. Let your children, therefore, by all means, learn the proofs annexed, in some of your little catechisms, to the various questions. I will not take it upon me to commend any parts of scripture, as if they excelled all other parts of it; but the proofs from scripture adduced, in your small catechisms, to establish the various articles of religion, are not, certainly, inferior in value and usefulness to any other passages of the Bible, and deserve to be imprinted on our memories, for the sake of those doctrines which they establish.

There are other small catechisms well known to you, which may be of great use to parents, as well as children, because they will enable them, with advantage and ease, to explain the important truths

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of

of our Shorter Catechism. I wish that they were more used than they are, by persons of mature age; for there are questions in them which many young, or even middle-aged persons, cannot answer. I would not, however, rigorously insist on young persons learning them so exactly as the Shorter Catechism. If they learn them so well as to understand the Shorter Catechism by means of them, the chief design of them is gained.

Let parents encourage, or even request, public teachers to teach their children the questions of the Catechism. But this is not all that is necessary for them. Let parents themselves hear their children repeat the questions, and endeavour to make them understand what they repeat, as far as they can be supposed capable of understanding it; for it cannot be expected that they should be able to understand even the Shorter Catechism in every part, and in its utmost extent of meaning. The time and labour, however, are not lost, which are bestowed on every part of it. Having the questions in their memories, they will find them of great use when they are able to understand them better.

Besides the incapacity of children to understand every part of the Catechism, there is another thing which ought to be considered, that it is difficult, if possible, to engage them to attend to the meaning of the truths contained in it. For this reason, it appears to me highly expedient to try another method of drawing their attention to the capital truths of our religion. The method I mean is, to make them early acquainted with the history of the Bible, by repeating it in their ears, as soon as they are disposed to listen

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to it, which they will be before they are able to read it, and long before they can derive much profit from the reading. It happens very disadvantageously to our young people in North Britain, that the language generally spoken is very different, in multitudes of words, from the language which we read. Young persons, therefore, have learned to read long before they can form clear apprehensions of the meaning of what they read; nor can they be expected to pay the same attention to the meaning of what they read, as of what they hear. A minute discourse from the mouth of one whom they respect, will give them, in their earliest years, more knowledge than an hour's reading, if he adapts his manner of speaking to their understanding and to their taste. Nor will it be difficult for him to know when they understand and relish what he says. Tell them the story of Joseph in a manner suited to their years, and their eyes will be fixed upon you. They will drink in your words as the earth drinketh in the rain. They will almost weep when you speak of the pit, and of the tears of Joseph. They will beg to hear the story an hundred times. They will submit to any task you may chuse to impose on them, if you will give them stories about Joseph, or Elijah, or Daniel, or the three children.

When you teach them the histories of the Bible, you teach them its most important doctrines and precepts; for they are contained in the facts which you relate, or arise out of them so naturally, that they will impress themselves upon the minds of your children, whether you mention them expressly or not. What though they cannot tell you what is meant by the almightiness of God, when you have given them

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the history of the creation? They do not yet understand what is meant by the words used in expressing that attribute of the Most High; but they see that God does every thing he pleases by the word of his power. Or what though they cannot tell what is meant by original sin? When you have told them the story of Adam's fall, and of the introduction of death into the world by his sin, do they not see as plainly as they can be made to see it, that man was made in a holy and happy state, and that he is now in a state of sin and misery? When you give them the history of the birth, of the life, of the death, of the resurrection of the Son of God, have they not heard the great doctrines that relate to our redemption? Have you not taught them all that you can teach children, of the grace and glory of our Redeemer? and if the Spirit of God give the blessing which you seek and expect to your instructions, are they not prepared to love and trust the only Saviour?

By such instructions as these, it may be hoped that they will, with ease, be enabled, in a few years, to form a far clearer judgement than they could do without them, of the truths taught in their catechisms. They will know what is meant by Christ's offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice; what is meant by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; what is meant by the Spirit's application of the redemption purchased by Christ. For they have already often heard how the Son of God came into the world, how he fulfilled all righteousness, how he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and how he sent his Spirit to men, after he was taken up to heaven.

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But, before they can form these apprehensions of the doctrines of religion, which persons of mature age learn, with advantage, from systems of divinity, they may probably derive another advantage of infinitely greater consequence. The things which they have been taught, may be the seed of true faith, and of holy obedience, through the effectual working of the blessed Spirit. When Peter told Cornelius the leading facts of the history of Jesus, intermingling his discourse with a few observations naturally connected with them, the Spirit of God came upon Cornelius and his friends. When the apostles preached the gospel every where, the great subject of their discourses was the things recorded by the evangelists, the life, the works, the sufferings, the death, the resurrection, and exaltation of our Lord. And wherever the gospel was preached, the story of the holy woman that poured oil on his head was told.

Will it be asked still, What authority I have to recommend this mode of teaching? Do you not remember that Jesus still taught his disciples, and the multitudes, as they were able to hear and understand? If you are followers of Jesus, teach your children as they are able to hear. What would you think of ministers who preach sermons to their audiences, that can be understood only by students of divinity? Would they not be worthy to be turned out of their pulpits? Do not parents owe the same care to their children, that preachers owe to their hearers?

"Because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge, and" that he might do it effectually, "he sought to find out acceptable words." Indeed, if your words are not acceptable to your hearers, you

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may speak as much, and bring forth as much hidden knowledge as you please, but you will neither receive thanks, nor can you have the reasonable prospect of doing good; and I do not think you will find out any method of teaching that will be more acceptable to young persons, than that which I have been recommending.

The 78th psalm may safely be commended as one of the most useful in the whole sacred collection; and one to which we ought to pay a very particular attention, if the address with which it begins is divinely authorised. Now, in this psalm we have a specimen of the manner in which the ancient believers taught their children the truths of God, and nourished them up in the words of faith and of sound doctrine. "Give ear, O my people, to my law," says the holy psalm-writer; "incline your ear to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us." What were those things which their fathers had told them? The facts which Moses and Joshua, and other prophets, recorded in their histories. And as their fathers had told them these pieces of history, they were bound, in duty to their fathers, to God, to their own children, to speak of them to the rising race, and might promise themselves the happiest effects from such instructions. "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done." They did no more than God had commanded them to do, when they shewed to their children the praises of the Lord, and

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his strength, and his wonderful works. "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."

We are all commanded to speak of the works of God to one another; and how can we pretend to be lovers of God, if we reckon this commandment grievous? Parents, in particular, are required to speak of the works of God to their children. "These words," says Moses, "which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." This precept, as its importance well deserves, is found, almost in the same words, in two different passages of the concluding exhortations of Moses to his beloved nation of Israel, Deut. vi. 6.—9. xi. 18.—21. "These words which I command thee:" What words? Not merely the laws which were to be observed by the people, but the histories recorded by Moses, in which alone the meaning of many of them is to be found, and by which they are all powerfully enforced. When the histories were forgotten, the laws were disregarded, or the observance of them was perverted into a mere form, or into something worse. How could it be otherwise, when the express intention of several of the laws was to preserve

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preserve alive the remembrance of the works of the Lord, to excite the curiosity of those who had not yet heard of them, and to give to parents a favourable opportunity for communicating the knowledge of them to their children. The ordinance of the Sabbath was intended to keep up the remembrance of the work of creation. The ordinance of circumcision was intended to keep up the remembrance of God's gracious covenant made with Abraham, and commanded to a thousand generations. Various other ordinances were appointed to preserve the remembrance of what the Lord did in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness. "And it shall be," said Moses concerning the law of dedicating the first-born to the Lord, "when thy son asketh thee in time to come, What is this? then thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast; therefore I sacrifice unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the first-born of my children I redeem," Exod. xiii. 14.—16. A like injunction is given to the people concerning the feast of the passover, Exod. xii.

When Israel was a child, God loved him, and called his son out of Egypt, and led him about, and instructed him, as a father does the son whom he desires to train up in the way wherein he should go. And one of the ways whereby he instructed him, was by directing Moses to write, for his use, a history of all the most wonderful things that the Lord had done,

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from the time that man was placed upon the earth. If God suited the means of knowledge and grace to the state of his church when she was yet in her childhood, ought not parents to suit their instructions to the capacity of their children also, and to place before their eyes those sensible displays of divine truth with which we are furnished in so rich abundance by God himself? And if those discoveries of divine things which suited the childhood of the church were effectual means of faith and salvation, who can doubt but means of instruction, suited to the tender age of our own children, may be attended with the same happy effects? Gal. iv.

The duties of religion may be taught with great advantage in the same way. Tell them of the faith of Abraham, of the centurion, of the Syrophenician woman, of Paul, that you may teach them to rely on the power, on the mercy, on the word of God. When you tell them the history of Joseph, you teach them to obey their parents, to love their brethren, to forgive injuries, to bear afflictions, to abhor sin, even when it promises the greatest advantages, and to resist temptations to sin, at the risk of liberty and life. Tell them how Jesus lived, and how he died, and you teach them every virtue.

Whilst the disciples of Jesus were yet but children in understanding, he put them in mind of the miracle of the loaves, when they were afraid of wanting bread, and censured them for not drawing that conclusion which naturally arose from the miracle.

Our Lord exemplifies another method of instruction, which may be very profitably used with children by parents qualified to use it with advantage. He drew

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drew the most precious instructions from such objects as were best known to them, and often, perhaps, when these objects were present to their view. At a feast, he spoke of that feast of fat things which is set before us in the gospel. It is probable, that some lilies were in the view of the disciples, and that they beheld some fowls flying about in the air, when Jesus said to them, "Behold the fowls of the air—Consider the lilies of the field," Matth. vi. 26.—34. Luke, xiv. John, vi. 27.

I might farther observe, that we are not bound to confine ourselves to the histories of scripture, in teaching young persons what they are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. It will be of great use to them, when they are qualified to profit by it, to entertain them with some accounts of God's dealings with the Christian church, in various places of the world, and especially in our own land, and to set before them the brightest examples of virtue which the annals of our forefathers, or any other uninspired writings furnish. Scripture itself often refers us to human histories for useful information, Esther, x. 2. Numb. xxi.

2. Parents must bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, by the due exercise of parental authority over them.

"I know Abraham," says the Lord, "that he will command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do judgement and justice." If Abraham had only told his family what it was fit for them to do, if he had only advised and urged them to do their duty, without enjoining them to do what was agreeable to the mind of God, the

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would not have obtained this commendation from the Lord. Eli told his children that their conduct was very offensive to God, and would be followed with fatal consequences to themselves; but because he did not exert his authority to enforce his admonitions, the Lord justly complained of him as a partner in the wickedness of his sons, and threatened to inflict such vengeance on the house of Eli, as would cause the ears of all that heard of it to tingle.

Eli was, indeed, more than a father to his sons, for he was the judge of Israel, and ought to have inflicted on them the penalties of the law; but any father of such sons in Israel, might, by a legal process, have procured the execution of these penalties; and although we are neither in Eli's station, nor under the political laws of the Jews, yet we are kings in our own families, and ought to have our children in subjection, for the Lord hath given the father honour over his children, and hath established the authority of the mother over her sons.

When you find it required in those who are to be invested with the office of bishops, that they must "have their children in subjection with all gravity," you are not to think that other parents are left at liberty to surrender the authority with which God hath entrusted them over their children. When God will admit none into the sacred ministry that knows not how to govern his own house, he sets a mark of his disapprobation upon all those parents, who, through sloth, or weakness, or foolish fondness, suffer their children to do what they please, 1 Tim. iii.

What would you think of a king, who was so averse to severities in his administration, as to suffer every

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every man in his dominions to do what he pleased? Could the worst tyrant in the world do more to make his subjects miserable and wicked? The mischiefs that would result to a single family from the want of due controul, would bear the same proportion to the state of such a king's dominions, as a family bears to a nation. The exercise of authority in a family where the children are young, is more necessary, if possible, than the due exercise of royal power in a nation; because men of mature age may possibly be able and willing to govern themselves, but every child left to himself, must bring his parents to shame. Indeed, the shame of his conduct must fall upon them, rather than upon himself, because it belongs to them, more than to himself, to govern his conduct.

Every father will find it necessary, in many instances, to exercise authority over his children. His house would soon become an unpleasant dwelling to him, if he suffered young children, without restraint, to do whatever they pleased. He will not suffer them to carry burning sticks through the house, or to dash the cups and platters upon the ground. But if parents find it absolutely necessary, for the security of their life and property, to exert authority, why should they not exert it likewise to enjoin them those duties which God requires, and to restrain them from doing what he forbids? What are we to think of parents who will not allow their children to break a china-cup, and yet will suffer them to break the commandments of God? Can those men be called Christians, who will tolerate sin in their families, whilst they tolerate nothing that is, in the smallest degree, injurious to their secular interests?

Command
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Command your children to read the Bible, to learn the questions of their Catechism, to pray every morning and evening. Take them with you to the public assembly of worshippers, and see that they behave with decency and propriety. Forbid them to lie, to sport themselves on the Lord's day, or to behave disrespectfully to those whom they ought to reverence for their station or their age. See that no corrupt communication come out of their mouths. And let your injunctions be suited to their circumstances, their years, and their temptations.

There is nothing in which you will find it more necessary to exert your authority, than in guarding your children against bad company. In that golden book which Solomon wrote, "to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion," the first precept, after that of fearing the Lord, and giving due honour to parents, is contained in these words: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. My son, walk not thou in the way with them, refrain thy foot from their path." Nor did the wise man think it sufficient to lay down this precept in the beginning of his book. He often resumes it: "Enter not," he says again, "into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not amongst wine-bibbers, amongst riotous eaters of flesh." Admonitions to young persons are admonitions to parents likewise, because parents ought to watch over them as those that

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that must give account. Young children cannot be expected to make a proper choice of their companions, without direction from their parents. And as many vicious young persons are possessed of insinuating manners, and an engaging behaviour, they may render themselves too agreeable to other young persons; in which case, authority, as well as advice, will be necessary to prevent a connection that may be attended with disagreeable consequences. What father would suffer the child whom he loves to go into a house where other children are dying by a putrid fever, or by the small-pox, if he had not already escaped from that disease? How much more pernicious is the infection of bad manners than the small-pox, or the most pestilential fever! Where is our regard to God, or to the souls of our children, if we do not guard them, with greater anxiety, from every thing that may ruin their souls, than from those distempers which may prove fatal to their bodies?

As virtue is a part of religion, and industry is essential to virtuous conduct, it is necessary for those who desire to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, that, where circumstances will admit of it, they should make use of their authority to educate them in habits of industry. Men were not made by God to play on the dry land, like the leviathan in the waters. But if habits of industry are not acquired in early years, it will never become pleasant; and those who are not employed in doing something that is good, if they enjoy health, will be doing something that is not good, 1 Tim. v. 13. I do not, however, mean that you should restrain them from employing a reasonable proportion of time in

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those sports which are useful to cheer their spirits, and to strengthen their bodies, especially in that period of childhood when they are yet unfit for useful labour. We behold one of the many instances of divine mercy which we enjoy, when we pass through our towns, and see them full of boys and girls playing in their streets, Zech. viii. 5.

When I exhort you to use your authority over your children, to train them up in the way that they should go, some of you will probably alledge that you find it very difficult to maintain your authority, and that you would be glad of some directions on this subject. You have sufficient direction in the text, and in the Proverbs of Solomon. Here you are taught to treat your children with justice and mildness. If you do so, your children are very perverse if they do not obey you. They soon feel their dependence upon you; and if, at the same time, you make them to love you, which it is not difficult to do, your word will be a law to them. There is nothing which they will dread more than offending you, and forfeiting your smiles. A slight hint will do more with them than a hundred lashes from a tyrant, whom his unhappy children despair of pleasing.

Foolishness, however, is bound up in the hearts of children, and words of reproof, or the rod of correction, and, for the most part, both together, are necessary to drive it far from them.

You must reprove and rebuke your children, when they wilfully transgress your orders, or break the commandments of God. It is not mentioned to the honour of David, that he had never said to his son Adonijah, "Why hast thou done so?" If David had

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had been less sparing of his reproofs, it is probable that Adonijah would not have rebelled against him in his old age. His ambition prevailed over his love to his indulgent father, for his love was not coupled with fear. As a twofold cord is not easily broken, so the united principles of fear and love to parents will, for the most part, be a powerful restraint upon those corrupt dispositions of children, by which they may be tempted to embitter the days of their parents.

When I exhort you to reprove and admonish your offending children, do not imagine that I call you, on any occasion, to cast away the bowels of a father. What father on earth is to be compared, for kindness to his children, with our heavenly Father? and yet he often rebukes, and reproves, and chastens. He scourges every son whom he receives. Be ye followers of God, as dear children, and frequently recollect, for the direction of your parental behaviour, that you also have a Father in heaven.

Your heavenly Father spares you, as a man spares his son that serves him. He does not enter into judgement with you, because you are not so perfect as the angels of heaven, but he restrains your corruptions by his gracious discipline: and when you do not vigorously oppose the workings of the law of sin in your members, he makes you sensible of his displeasure by the withdrawment of his heavenly consolations, by the upbraidings of your own consciences, or by his rod upon your persons, your estates, your characters. Are you not thankful that he does not leave you to yourselves, but rebukes and chastens you, that you may be partakers of his holiness? We

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there any passage of the Bible which assured you of exemption from chastisement, would you consider it as a promise? Would you not consider it as one of the most tremendous threatenings that could be uttered by the mouth of God? Why, then, do you imagine that parental love should hinder you from speaking an unpleasant word to your children? You do not love them, you hate them with a deadly hatred, if you do not reprove and rebuke them with all authority, when you see them sinning against their own souls. If you saw them sporting with a sharp knife, you would run and pull it with all haste out of their hands. If you saw them amusing themselves with an adder, and pleased with the sight of its speckled skin, would you not venture your own lives to remove it from their reach, before they received a fatal wound from its deadly sting? But no serpent is so deadly as sin. Flee from sin, and cause your children to flee from it, as from the face of a serpent. The teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion, slaying the souls of men.

When God rebukes his people, he "remembers mercy in the midst of wrath." He will not lay upon them more than is meet and necessary for accomplishing the purposes of his love. He adjusts his corrections, not to their demerits, but to his gracious designs of promoting and perfecting the work of their sanctification. Thus, in reproving our children, we ought still to have their benefit in view. We may testify hot displeasure, but we must not discover any degree of hatred or revenge. They are but children, and we who are men have our faults. Their spirits may be crushed, they may despair of ever pleasing us; and such

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such despair may harden their hearts against reproof, when they find us inflamed with fierce resentment for every fault.

The Lord will not contend with his children, nor even with his enemies, without good reason. He would not destroy the Sodomites, though wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly, without knowing whether their iniquity was altogether as the cry that had come up unto him. It is said of our Lord Jesus Christ, that "he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears, but shall judge with righteousness the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." Thus parents, in reproving their children, are not to proceed upon mere surmises, nor to prostitute their authority by reprimands that may very possibly be undeserved. If a matter is dubious, and yet deserving cognizance, let them rest satisfied with such admonitions as do not imply a presumption of guilt, or let them make proper inquiries before they fix blame. But it is not safe, for the most part, to interrogate children themselves, so as to require them to be their own accusers. This is strongly tempting them to lie; and it is better to let some faults pass uncensured, and to rest satisfied with general admonitions, even where there is a presumption of blameable conduct, than to refer their guilt or innocency to their own testimony. If you tempt them to lie once or twice, you may lead them into a habit of one of the meanest and most pernicious vices of which human nature is capable; for what can be worse than to become exact resemblances of the father of lies? Few men ever lied for the first or the second time, with

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out an inward sense of shame or terror. But, let a child be strongly tempted to lie now and then, to conceal his faults, and it is very probable that lying will become his habitual practice, and will ruin him, both in this world and in the next.

The Lord will not be always contending with his children, he will not draw out his displeasure against them for ever; and fathers that deserve the name will not be constantly reproving their children. This would be to alienate their hearts from their parents, and tempt them to think that parental authority is a yoke too heavy to be borne. It might prompt them to some desperate attempts for shaking it off, and thus produce effects that would be sorely felt to the day of the death of both parents and children, and through eternity itself.

"The Lord is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," both when he smiles upon his children, and when he contends with them. He mingles judgement with mercy, and he regulates and proportions his chastisements with a variety of procedure wonderfully calculated to accomplish the ends which he designs, Isa. xxviii. 25.—29. We cannot pretend to a close imitation of the wisdom of his conduct in the management of our children, because we have but a very contracted view of those circumstances, events, and effects, which would determine our conduct, if they could be known. We can only conjecture what effect particular acts of parental discipline may have. Yet there are general rules of procedure which it is safe to observe, and which afford no reason for bitter self-reflection, and give no occasion for censure from others, when we observe, although the

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consequences

consequences may not be such as we wish and expect; for we are not bound to be prophets. We are accountable for the morality of our conduct, but not for its effects.

We ought, in reproving, (and the same rule ought to be applied to correction), to consider persons, times, places, circumstances of several different kinds, that the end may, if possible, be gained. There is no partiality in correcting or reproving one child more severely than another for the same fault, if there be a good reason for the difference that is made between them. "A reproof entereth into a wise man, more than an hundred stripes into a fool." Some children are wise, and some are foolish. To some a word, or even a hint, is sufficient. To some ten, or a hundred blows, are insufficient to convince them of their errors. Why should parents run into an error, when they are correcting error? Too much, or too little, are both errors. Only the last can more easily be repaired, because what is undone may be done, but what is done cannot be undone.

There is a time for every thing. There is a time for correcting, and a time for with-holding correction. With-hold not correction when it may be profitable; but, although a fault has been committed, it may be inexpedient to correct till a more convenient season is come. If, for instance, you correct your child before he is duly informed concerning the nature of his fault, he will be only exasperated and hardened.

There is a sense of honour in the minds of young persons, as well as of their seniors. If you are too open with your reproofs and corrections, their sensi-

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bility is awakened to violence of passion; and whilst you endeavour to amend a fault, you tempt them to the commission of worse faults. There are, however, cases in which publicity of reproof or correction may be necessary, either to make the impression sufficiently deep on the mind of the child corrected, or for a warning to others. Wisdom is profitable to direct in what cases this may be necessary. So many circumstances must come into account, that it is not easy, if possible, to lay down particular rules, without multiplying and modifying them without end.

One of the most necessary rules concerning admonition and correction, is, never to begin without intending to make an end. I do not say, without making an end; because you may have been unwise in beginning, and ought to proceed no further; or circumstances may occur, which render it inexpedient to finish what is begun: But this I say, that when you enter into controversy with any of your children, it is of the utmost importance that you should prevail in the contest. If he gains his point, your authority is weakened, and he is encouraged and emboldened to repeat his offences. Never, therefore, enter upon a business of this kind, without a reasonable prospect of success. Better to leave your child unchastised, than to chastise him into greater perverseness; which is likely to be the case when you leave him without making him to repent of what he has done, and to resolve that he will do so no more.

There are some parents who do not consider the difference between reproving and threatening. When they are displeased with their children, they do not endeavour to make them sensible of the evil of what

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they have done, that they may be convinced and reformed, but they terrify them by threatenings; the effect of which will be, that the repetition of the fault may be prevented for some little time, whilst the child is under the eye of the parent, but he will soon lose the impression, or even, whilst it continues, will not scruple to commit the same fault, when he hopes to escape detection. And we know that children easily form such hopes, when they feel themselves inclined to do what they are forbidden to do.

I do not, however, forbid you to make use of threatenings as well as reproofs; for the fear of your displeasure is necessary to check their corrupt propensities; and it is easier to make them sensible of the danger they may incur from your displeasure, than of the baseness of your conduct, or of the danger of punishment from God. But join both together, that they may be taught to hate sin as well as punishment, to fear God as well as to fear their parents. And take care to threaten no punishment for their faults but what you seriously mean to inflict, and what you are warranted to inflict. Don't tell them that you will break their heads, or that you will cut out their ears, if they again offend you. If they believe such threatenings, they will dread you as they would do a wild beast; and when they find that you do not execute these threatenings, they learn from you to lie. With what face will you ever punish them for lying, if you have taught them, by your example, to speak things that are contrary to their designs, or their thoughts?

But, if you have threatened only such punishments as you are warranted to inflict, let them never [illegible] cause

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cause to think, that your reproofs and threatenings are but morning-clouds which pass away, and leave no trace behind. Chastise them with all that severity which you have given them reason to expect, that they may not secretly laugh at your great swelling words of vanity, and set at nought all your future reproofs. What would you think of a country that enjoyed the best of laws for checking vice, whilst they were seldom or never executed? If you were born in such a country, you would be compelled, by the abounding of wickedness and violence, to exchange your native country for a place of voluntary exile. And you will soon find your own house an habitation no less uncomfortable, however sharply you threaten, if you never proceed to punish. It may be said of most children, (though not all), as Solomon says of servants, that they will not be corrected by words; for though they hear, they will not answer.

I know there are many parents who are sufficiently forward with their reproofs and threatenings; but if their children will not be reclaimed by words, they cannot proceed any farther. The rod of correction would give ten times more pain to themselves than to their children. They will use reproof as well as instruction, to give wisdom to their little ones; but if the rod too is necessary for the purpose, they will suffer them to die fools.

But, consider attentively what Solomon says to you on this subject: Bring forth your strong arguments, and he will soon put you to silence.

You will not use the rod to give your children wisdom; but if you do not, you are cruel both to your children and to yourselves. You are cruel to their mother

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mother that bare them. You are rebellious against God, who vouchsafes, by Solomon, to give you, not one, but many directions concerning the correction of your children, and who tells you, in plain terms, that "the rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame," Prov. xxix. 15.

You feel the blows of the rod so sensibly on your own bowels, that you cannot make use of it. But Solomon assures you from God, that your pleasure will greatly overbalance your pain. Your grief must be lasting and incurable, if, through the neglect of any needful part of discipline, that foolishness which is bound up in the hearts of your children is suffered to remain. But, "correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight to thy soul," Prov. xxix. 17.

You love your children, and therefore you cannot bear the thought of making them uneasy. But, if you really love your children with an affection that becomes either a saint or a man, you will not scruple to give them those pains which are requisite for their welfare. Will you not, if they break their legs by a fall, compel them to submit to all that uneasiness which is necessary to restore them the use of their legs? If they are sick, will you not oblige them to swallow those bitter drugs which are necessary for the restoration of their health? Confess that you are more solicitous about the health of their bodies, than the welfare of their souls, if you will not correct them when they do amiss; and that your love to them is of that wretched kind, which, in the language of the Holy Ghost, is rather to be called hatred

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than love; for "he that spareth the rod hateth his child; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes." "He that spareth the rod hateth his child." I do not deny that this language is figurative, but it is just, it is expressive, it is striking. It contains a just and much-needed admonition respecting that love which all parents ought to bear, and every wise parent will bear, to his children. And if any man should chuse to understand the expression literally, his mistake will only be about the meaning of the expression. The sentiment will be just, which the expression, in this sense, conveys. A child left to himself will very probably become odious, even in the eyes of his parents, by behaving so ill as to compel them to hate him, although they were most powerfully prompted by the instincts of nature to love him.

Do you alledge, that you may possibly procure to yourselves the hatred of your children, by reproving and correcting them? You are much more likely to procure it by a criminal indulgence of their follies: "He that maketh too much of his son shall bind up his wounds, and his bowels will be troubled at every cry. An horse not broken becometh headstrong, and a child left to himself will be wilful. Cocker thy child, and he shall make thee afraid. Play with him, and he will bring thee to heaviness. Laugh not with him, lest you have sorrow with him, and lest thou gnash thy teeth in the end. Give him no liberty in his youth, (*i. e.* no licentious liberty), and wink not at his follies. Bow down his neck while he is young, and beat him on the sides while he is a child, lest he wax stubborn, and be disobedient to thee, and so bring sorrow to thine heart. Chastise thy son, and hold

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him to labour, lest his lewd behaviour be an offence unto thee," Ecclus. xxx. 7.—13. These words are not Solomon's, but they are the words of a venerable Jewish sage, who had learned much from Solomon, and from his observation of human life. And they agree with Solomon's doctrine: "He that reproveth a man, shall afterwards find more favour than he that flattereth him with his lips. Chastise thy son, and thou shalt have joy of him."

But what if I should kill him, or crush his spirit? —Why are you afraid of such consequences as these? It is not the sword, but the rod, that is recommended to you, and you are commanded to use it with the wisdom of a man, with the affection of a father: "With-hold not correction from thy child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die." He shall live. The rod is a preservative from death, and from what is a thousand times worse than death: "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." You have perhaps heard the story of a young man led to the gallows, who said, 'It is not the judge, it is my mother, that has brought me to this shameful end.' The same thing might have been said by many of those who have suffered for their crimes. And those who are hanged for their crimes are far from being the one half of those that come to a miserable and untimely end by the fault of their parents, in the neglect of needful discipline.

3. Parents must "bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," by setting them a good example.

Example has a mighty influence upon full-grown men. Peter's example at Antioch had a kind of compulsory

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compulsory influence upon the minds of the Jewish disciples. They knew that Peter was a wiser man than themselves; and when they saw that he would not eat with the Gentiles, "Surely," said they within themselves, "the mind of the Lord is with him;" it must be sinful to eat with the Gentiles; at least, it must be safest, if the case is doubful, to do as this great apostle does. Thus, a disingenuous bigotry, to the great prejudice of the church, would soon have taken deep root at Antioch, and that city, which gave birth to the Christian name, might have become the beginning of one of the most Antichristian iniquities, if Paul, through divine mercy, had not been strengthened to plead the cause of Christian liberty, against the man to whom, perhaps, of all others, he paid the greatest deference.

What Peter was to Barnabas, and to others that were carried away by his dissimulation, you are to your children, if they possess the modesty which belongs to their age, and feel that affection which becomes their relation to those who gave them birth. Although you are far from equalling Peter, yet your children probably pay you as much deference as Barnabas paid to Peter, and will be as ready to follow your example, and to think that they do well in following it. Have you not heard that the children of Mahometans, for the most part, follow the doctrines of Mahomet; that the children of Papists worship saints and angels; that the heathen nations worship the gods of their fathers, and would reckon it shameful to abandon that religion which has been transmitted to them from many generations of ancestors? Do

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Do you not observe, that, for the most part, the children of men who make no pretensions to religion are equally indifferent to it with their parents; and that those who have the happiness to be born of religious parents appear to tread in the footsteps of their fathers, or, if they do not, are despised by those who are no better than themselves, except that they are less inexcuseable, because they did not enjoy the same advantage of religious education?

Solomon's words are all true. They are the faithful sayings of God, however little some regard them in their practice; and who is ignorant of the earnestness with which he warns young persons against the company of bad men and bad women? Parents who deserve the name, will endeavour to preserve their children from that pestilence of bad example, which has been the destruction of so many millions of our race. But what are we to think of those parents who are themselves the corrupters of their children, by the practice of those vices which cannot but bring the wrath of God upon all that practise them? Do they deserve the honourable name of parents? Is the life which they have given to their children sufficient to counterbalance that eternal death to which they expose them? Will not many children of Christian parents wish at the last, that their fathers had buried them alive, rather than trained them up in the service of the devil, whose wages are everlasting burnings? Are not godless parents bringing up their children to the great murderer of our race? Is not that death to which they are exposing them, by their pernicious example, a thousand times more dreadful than to be buried alive, before they are capable of

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doing good or evil, before they are capable of adding many actual transgressions to that sin which they bring into the world.

No sentence of a heathen writer hath come more frequently into my mind than one of a Roman poet, who says, that "the greatest reverence is due to a child." We must cast no stumbling-blocks, or occasions to fall, in the way of any of our brethren of the human race, but least of all in the way of children, because they are most likely to be hurt, perhaps ruined by them. How do they learn most of the things which they learn, but by imitation? Nature, or rather the God of nature, has wisely appointed this to be the way of learning most of those things which are necessary for the support and comfort of the present life. Without this principle of imitation, we would grow up more rude and uncultivated than the Hottentots. But do not turn this principle into an instrument of destruction to their souls. If you will needs be wicked, be wicked by yourselves, and let no part of your bad conduct appear in the eyes of those who, in all probability, will think that they do right in following your example. You will find the guilt of your own blood heavy enough to bear; why should you go to the eternal world laden with the guilt of destroying more souls than one?

Remember that young persons are neither qualified nor disposed to make the distinctions that you may think easy and natural. You can distinguish between a lie and a jest, which, in the early part of childhood, they cannot do; and therefore, by jesting with them, or in their presence, you may teach them to lie. Although evil-speaking, in general, is sinful, yet you

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reckon it lawful, on some occasions, to speak of the bad things you have heard of some of your neighbours. But by doing this unguardedly, you may teach them to be backbiters. Abstain from every thing that has the appearance of evil, especially before those who have not yet learned to distinguish between realities and appearances. If one of your elder boys should climb upon the branches of a tree, you will not be displeased with him if he does it only in company with boys of the same size, because they may amuse themselves with the same sport without danger; but if he should do the same thing in the presence of your younger children, you will beat him with severity, because he has taught his younger brothers a lesson that may cost them a broken leg. If you expect that little boys should pay some regard to the consequences of their actions, what excuse remains for you, if you do those things which, though innocent in themselves, may, in their consequences, be productive of eternal misery to persons whose salvation ought to be the object of your constant care?

But it is not sufficient for you to set no bad example, and no example that may prove bad in the use that will be made of it before your children: You must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well, and make your light so to shine before every beholder, and especially before your own families, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

When you wish to have your children taught a profession to be the employment of their life, you do not send for a man of that profession to come to your house, and lay down and explain all the rules of it.

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You know, that if he should repeat these rules an hundred times, till they were all deeply fixed in your son's mind, very little is gained. He must see those things done that he is to do, and by careful imitation learn to do what has been done by his teacher; and, therefore, you bind him to an apprenticeship of several years. Does not this consideration convince you of the importance of teaching, by a good example, what is infinitely more important than all arts or sciences?

I do not say, that you are to make a show of your religion before your families, or before the world. That would be setting a bad, and not a good example before them. An ostentatious piety cannot hide that folly and self-conceit which is the principle of it. But there are many duties which are public in their nature; and if you neglect them, or perform them in a careless manner, you wrong, you greatly wrong, the souls of your children. They have eyes in their heads, and perhaps they see better than you imagine, and can apply the proverb, "Physician, heal thyself," with no less readiness than yourselves. When you see preachers negligent of those duties which they warmly recommend, you despise them, you look upon them as the most contemptible of all human beings, because they affect airs of seriousness in the pulpit, and shew themselves destitute of it every where else. Will not your children think the same of yourselves, when they often hear you recommend prayer, and never hear you pray? when you tell them, that they must daily read the scriptures, and never take that blessed book into your hands?

The wise, among the heathen nations, were very

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sensible of the importance of being trained to virtue by domestic examples. When the Spartans, subdued by Antipater the Macedonian, were required to give him a certain number of their children as hostages for their good behaviour, their ambassadors answered, that they would rather give him double the number of old men. And when the people in their public assembly were threatened with Antipater's vengeance, if they did not comply with his requisition, they unanimously answered, that it was better to die, than to suffer what was worse than death. Of such importance did the whole city reckon it to be, that their young persons should be educated in the observation of the customs of their fathers, which they preferred to all others in the world. Did they value so highly that mode of living which they learned from Lycurgus? What excuse can be made for us, if we discover no anxiety to train up our children in the observation of those holy practices which we have learned from Christ?

"In all things that I have commanded you," says God, "be circumspect." All Christians ought to be careful that they transgress not the least of the commandments of Christ. But parents ought to be doubly circumspect, lest, by some undesigned omission of duty, or some inconsiderate action of life, they hurt the interest of religion in their families for generations to come. There were many good kings of David's family, who were much inferior to David their father, because they neglected one thing which probably appeared to them to be of such inferior importance to other parts of duty, that they did not greatly attend to it; and when the most sufficient of them, who deservedly obtained a good

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did not attend to it, his descendants would think themselves happy, when they walked in his steps, without proceeding any farther in the reformation of the people. You will probably guess that I have in view that defect in the character of Asa, and many of his successors, that they did not remove the high places, where the true God was worshipped, though not agreeably to his own appointment. Asa was the first of Solomon's successors who walked in the ways of David and Solomon. His heart was perfect all his days, but he did not remove the high places. Jehoshaphat was an eminent saint, and yet he did not reckon it necessary to do what his good father Asa had not done. The following kings, for several generations, were either wicked men, or were far inferior to these two princes in piety; and the high places kept their ground, till a man arose to bless Judah, who was not inferior to David himself, and who was too wise to pay any regard to what either Asa or Jehoshaphat did, unless he found it agreeable to the law of Moses. Hezekiah was a second David; and although his son and grandson were wicked, the third in descent from him, Josiah by name, trod in his steps, and like these two men there was no king in Judah, before or after them.

The wise and good should endeavour, for the sake of their children, as well as for their own sake, to be wise and good in every thing. Solomon was the wisest of men, but he was unwise in multiplying wives, and in multiplying horses: and we find, that his two next successors took many wives, and that all his successors made more use of horses than the law of Moses allowed, till that King of Zion appeared,

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who came riding to Jerusalem upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.

Abraham was wise and good beyond most men that ever lived. There are, however, two things in his conduct that do not merit imitation: his marrying Hagar, and his dissimulation about Sarah. The first of these was not likely to mislead Isaac; he knew too well what it was to have an Ishmael for a brother, and a Hagar for a stepmother and a rival to his true mother, to bring a Hagar or an Ishmael into his own family. But in the other blameable, or suspicious, instance of his father's behaviour, he made no scruple of following him. What Abraham did in Egypt, and in Gerar, Isaac made no scruple of doing at Gerar. What Abraham did, not once, but twice, Isaac might think, could scarcely be wrong.

Perhaps you may think, that the instances I have produced, instead of being warnings against uncircumspection of conduct, are rather apologies for your defects. You cannot hope to be better men than Abraham, and therefore you deserve little blame if your conduct deserves as little reprehension as his. But have you Abraham's virtues to set against his defects? or, have you the same excuses for the defects of your conduct that Abraham had, who enjoyed but a very small part of that revelation of the will of God which you enjoy, and whose temptations were a thousand times harder to be overcome than yours? But, remember besides, that, if you live uncircumspectly, because Abraham erred twice or thrice in his conduct, you can have no pretence to say that you walk in the steps of Abraham. He did not walk uncircumspectly. The strictest Christians amongst us are

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chargeable with more defects in conduct than Abraham. If you will not take good heed to your ways, your errors in conduct will be perhaps every day more numerous, or worse than the errors of his whole life, after he attained to the knowledge of God. When you have done all that you can to guard against offensive conduct, you will not be more free from blemishes than the holy men of ancient days.

Remember also, that the good men of ancient days were far from approving of those evil things which, through the overpowering force of temptation, they sometimes did. No saint spoken of in the Bible gave more offence by some parts of his conduct, than Solomon; but none could be more sensible than Solomon, after he repented, of the mischief which may follow single instances of misconduct in the wise and good. There is a warning in the last of his books, which, if men would attend to it, might do more good than ever the example of his irregularities did hurt: "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour," Eccl. x. 1.

I have spoken of what parents ought, in their own persons, to do for bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But it is not to be expected that most fathers can do every thing needful to be done for this purpose. Children are commonly sent to school, where they ought to receive instruction in religion, as well as in reading and writing; and parents, if they have the opportunity of making a choice, ought to give a preference to those schools where their children are likely to be best educated,

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educated, by instruction and example, in the knowledge of religion, and in the practice of virtue. If we have horses to be trained up for riding, we put them into the hands of those men who are most likely to break them to the saddle, and to cure them of every vicious habit. If we have ground to cultivate, we employ such servants as are best skilled in the use of the plough, and in every part of husbandry; and we do not grudge the best wages to those who are likeliest to give us satisfaction by their work. If we are less careful to find proper teachers for our children, we deserve the reproof which the philosopher Crates gave to the Athenians, "O ye Athenians! why are ye so careful to provide estates for your children, and so careless about providing children for your estates?"

There is a complaint among some parents, that schoolmasters are not so careful as they have been in some former times, to teach their pupils the principles of religion. The complaint, I am afraid, is just: but parents ought to leave a part of it on themselves. Schoolmasters, I think, would be more careful of this part of their duty, if the parents of their pupils would roundly inform them that the neglect of it is very disagreeable to them. When we think we have reason to complain of our neighbours, let us complain first of all to themselves. Perhaps they will reform their conduct, and leave us no reason to complain to others. If they do not, we will complain to others with a better grace.

Sunday-schools are now set up in many parts of our land. These, it is to be hoped, will be an excellent help to those parents who desire to educate

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their children in the fear of God; for emulation will prompt children to learn those things with alacrity, which they will not easily be induced to learn without companions. Fathers, therefore, it may be presumed, will encourage them, from a regard to the welfare of their own children, as well as to the welfare of the rising generation in general. And if any parents are too negligent to bestow all that care which is requisite for the instruction of their own families, it is to be hoped, that they will at least take the trouble of sending them to places where they may be taught without any expence to themselves. There are some parents whom poverty may excuse for not employing physicians to cure the diseases of their children; but no excuse could be made for them, if they refused to employ a physician who undertook to cure their children without reward. Instruction is as necessary to the mind of a child, as medicine to his body in a fever; and so much the more necessary, that there is not the same natural vigour in the mind, as there often is in the body, to expel disease without the application of means.

But nothing is more necessary for bringing up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, than fervent prayer to God, for his blessing upon all the means used for this purpose. The endeavours of parents must be as ineffectual as the endeavours of ministers, to communicate good impressions, without divine influence; and yet all will acknowledge, that those preachers are unworthy of the pulpit, who do not accompany their public ministrations with the fervent devotions of the closet. Melancthon, that great reformer, when he was yet a young man, and not acquainted

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quainted by experience with the perverseness of mankind, flattered himself with the hope, that men would find it impossible to resist the force of those truths which he was able to represent to their minds; but he soon found, when he proceeded to the trial, that old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon. And old Adam is strong in the youngest of his offspring. The wise man speaks of young persons who, with bitter remorse, will be compelled to say at the last, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!"

There are, indeed, several proverbs of Solomon which give us ground to hope, that good and seasonable instruction will have the desired effect. These passages are proverbs, not direct promises. They express what is generally found by experience to be the case; not what will always be the case. They are not, however, to be considered as words of human wisdom. They are proverbs dictated by the Spirit of God, and imply a promise in them, to be understood with the same limitations as many other promises in the Bible. God does not intend by them to limit his own sovereignty, by bringing himself under obligations to communicate saving grace as an hereditary right to the children of the faithful, any more than he binds himself by the promises of success to faithful ministers, to convert, by the power of his Spirit, all their hearers, 1 Tim. iv. 26. Parents, therefore, must not trust to the best means they can use for promoting the spiritual welfare of their children. Sensible of their own unfitness to perform any useful service to

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God, without help from above, they must pray for that wisdom and fervency of spirit which is necessary for themselves, that they may perform the important duties of a parent, in a manner acceptable to God, and useful to their children. Sensible of the power of that corruption which dwells in the hearts of their children, and of the absolute sovereignty of divine grace, they must pray for a divine blessing on the instructions, admonitions, and corrections, which they dispense to them. The use which they ought to make of the promises of success to their endeavours, is to encourage them in praying to the Father of lights, the God of all grace, that he would verify his words, and fulfil the delightful hopes which they are fitted to inspire. If you ask a blessing on your children's food, as well as your own, because you know that God only can give a nutritive virtue to our bodily provisions; is it not equally necessary to solicit his blessing on their spiritual provision? If, when you call the physician to apply remedies to their distempers, you would reckon it presumptuous to seek to the physician, and not unto the Lord; is it not equally blameable to expect any benefit from the means you use to heal the distempers of their souls, without fervent applications to the throne of grace for a blessing on these means?

SER-

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SERMON III.

THE DUTY OF PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN.

EPH. vi. 4.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

III. I NOW proceed to consider with what propriety the apostle conjoins, in our text, the caution against provoking your children to wrath, with the command to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

1. Love to parents is an essential part of that religion in which they are to be educated; and, therefore, parents should do nothing that may be expected to alienate the affections of their children.

You know very well that it is your duty to love your wives; and yet if your wives are every day teazing and disquieting you with clamour, contradiction, reflections, and sullen behaviour, you find it almost, if not altogether, impossible to love them. Although your consciences tell you that it is your duty, although common sense teaches you that it is your interest, although the gospel suggests motives of infi-

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nite strength to enforce the duty; yet you will find it very difficult to refrain from hating them, and wishing that their tongue were silenced for ever by an incurable palsy. How, then, do you imagine that your children will love yourselves, if you hold them in constant uneasiness, by a severe and stern behaviour? Can you reasonably hope, that, at their years, they will behave more wisely, or feel the power of conscience more forcibly, or make a better use of the motives of the gospel enforcing obedience, than yourselves might be expected to do in a similar case?

Many parents complain of the disregard shewn them by their children. Children are exceedingly blameable, when they give just occasion for such complaints. But parents, in many cases, deserve a share, and a double share of the blame. They are Satan's agents in tempting their children to hate themselves, by a behaviour naturally calculated to inspire aversion.

Now, if you tempt your children to hate their own parents, how can you teach them that religion which is summed up in the love of God and man? If a man say that he loves God, whom he hath not seen, and hates his brother, whom he hath seen, he is a liar; and whom shall a man love, if he love not his own parents, who are, under God, the instruments of his being?

2. Parents ought to avoid all that behaviour which may excite disaffection in their children, that their instructions and admonitions may be received with pleasure.

Young persons will learn nothing, unless they taste some pleasure in what they endeavour to learn; and they

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they are very unlikely to take any pleasure in instruction when it begins to be communicated to them, if they feel an aversion to the persons of their instructors. They cannot be expected to know and relish the pleasures of what they learn, till they make some advances in knowledge, and feel, in some degree, the energy of truth, Prov. ii. 10.

Before the trouble of learning is sweetened by this experience, they must be allured by the kindness of their instructors; and even after religious knowledge is become in some degree pleasant, the remaining toil of learning, and the pain that attends necessary admonitions and corrections, must be qualified by that love to their teachers which kind usage cherishes, and which unnecessary rigour tends to destroy. Scripture tells us, that we ought to esteem very highly in love those who are over us, and admonish us. For what reason? That with pleasure we may drink in their instructions and admonitions. For this reason, public teachers ought to behave in such a manner as to gain, if possible, the love of those whom they are appointed to teach. Such was Paul's behaviour. No man valued human applause less than Paul, "for if I should yet please men," says he, "I should not be the servant of Christ;" yet no man was more careful, by a meek and gentle behaviour, to gain the attachment of those whom he taught. "We were gentle among you," says he to the Thessalonians, "even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but our own souls also, because ye were dear unto us." And again, "You know how we exhorted, and com-

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forted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." The blessed apostle could find no happier illustration of that gentleness and kindness which he showed to his beloved hearers, than the gentleness of a nurse in cherishing the tender babe committed to her care, or the tenderness with which a father exhorts, and comforts, and charges his son; as if that man were not a father, but an alien, or an enemy, who deals harshly with his children.

If even full-grown men must be treated with mildness by their teachers and rulers, that they may receive instruction, and submit with chearfulness to lawful authority, how much more is this gentle treatment necessary for children, who are less able to understand the advantage of instruction and government. If those who are parents in a figurative sense only, ought to treat their children with kindness, may it not be expected still more so from those who are parents in the literal sense; from those who are parents, both in the flesh, and in the Lord; from those to whom kind behaviour is so natural, and from whom it is so ordinarily to be expected, that other relations to whom authority belongs are called fathers, to express the kind regard which they ought to bear towards those who are under their authority?

3. Parents are to teach their children by example, as well as by their words. Now, that mildness of behaviour which the apostle recommends, is one distinguishing part of that Christian conduct which they ought to recommend by their example; because it must be visible to the eye of every beholder.

There are many of the most essential parts of religion which are secret in their nature, and cannot be made

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made public without the appearance of affectation. Many are the aspirations of the Christian after God, which none can witness. Many are the charities dispensed by an affluent Christian, with such secrecy that his left hand scarcely knows what his right hand doth. He feels bitter pangs for his sins, which no eye but the eye that sees all things can discern. To proclaim such acts of religion would not exhibit a good example. It would discover a vain and ostentatious temper of mind, as remote from the spirit of religion as pride is from humility. But there are good works which cannot be hid where they exist, and, by care to excel in them, we must make our light to shine before men. Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, we must think on these things, and practise them before the world, and in particular before our families, that they may glorify God, by walking in our steps.

I know you think that you ought to read God's word, to pray, to sing God's praises before your family. You would be ashamed to teach your children such duties, without letting them see that you practise them. But he that said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve," said likewise, "Ye parents, provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged. Let your moderation (or meekness) be known unto all men." If it must be made known unto all men, it ought especially to be made known unto your own families, whom you are bound to love with the most tender regard. Give no indulgence to an imperious temper any where, but especially in that place where no redress

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redress can be obtained, if you act the tyrant. Remember that the meekness and gentleness of Christ was one eminent part of that lovely example which he left us, and that he no where appeared more amiable than in his own family. Remember that meekness and gentleness are distinguishing characters of that wisdom which must appear in your own conduct, and which you must teach your children: "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew, out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom." That wisdom which is not joined with meekness is not the Christian wisdom. It is not the wisdom from above. It is earthly, sensual, devilish. "But the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy," James, iii. 13.—17.

We are all most deeply affected and impressed by those things that come nearest to ourselves. You may then believe that your children will be most deeply impressed by that part of your conduct which most nearly affects their comfort and happiness. No part of your behaviour will more likely be imitated by them, than your behaviour to themselves. If you wish them, therefore, to make themselves amiable to all around them, behave towards them with every reasonable expression of kindness. If you desire to see them contentious and quarrelsome, and ready, on every occasion, to pour forth torrents of abusive language, you cannot train them up more effectually in such an odious manner of behaviour, than by frequently

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quently provoking them to anger without any justifiable cause.

4. It is of vast importance to guard young persons against the common, but false and pernicious notion, that the ways of wisdom are not pleasantness and peace. But, instead of guarding them against this notion, you infuse it into their minds by harsh and rigorous behaviour.

All men desire to enjoy pleasure; but, above all, young persons and children, who have yet little relish for profit or honour, and therefore place the greatest part of the happiness of life in pleasure, and its chief misery in being denied those gratifications from which it results.

We have often heard of religious parents, whose days of old age have been imbittered by the bad behaviour of those children that have been, with the utmost care, educated in the knowledge and practice of religion. One cause of it has sometimes been, that the parents have over-done in this great duty of educating their children religiously. They have been too severe and harsh in their admonitions and reproofs. They have held the reins of discipline with too strait a hand, and have not duly considered the difference between youth and mature age; between babes, and young men, and fathers in Christ.

I am far from wishing any indulgence in sin to be granted to children, or connivance at the neglect of any necessary duty. I do not say that they ought to be allowed too much time even for their lawful diversions. But this I say, that they ought to be governed as much as possible by love, and that the love of their parents should be made apparent to them in

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their general course of behaviour, unless their faults exceed the ordinary faults of young persons of their age. I plead not for sin, but for the honour of religion, when I contend, that compassion and kindness should be shewn even to offending children, when they give signs of repentance; and often, too, before they give signs of repentance, that they may be the more easily induced to repent. "When Israel was a child," says God, "then I loved him. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by the arms. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love, and I was to them as they that take off the yoke from their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." If the Lord had not shewed all that sparing mercy and tender kindness to his nation in their state of childhood, he would not have accounted their defections so inexcuseable as they were. "What iniquity," says he, "have your fathers found in me, that they are gone away far from me? Have I been unto Israel a barren wilderness, or a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee?" Had God been a barren wilderness unto them, they might have pleaded something to excuse themselves, when they came no more unto him. If he had not drawn them with cords of love, and with the bands of a man, they could not indeed have alledged that there was any unrighteousness with him; but their alienation from God would have been ten times less aggravated. Thus, likewise, if, through the austerity of parents, religion feels as a load to their children, which they will shake off as soon as it is in their power, they deserve pity as well as blame; and those, whosoever they be, that give occasion

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casion for unjust suspicions concerning the ways of God, must bear their own burden.

Our blessed Lord, by his example, taught us how to avoid both the dangerous extremes of suffering sin in his pupils, and of discouraging their hearts by needless austerities. When Peter spoke against the cross, he reproved him with severity as an agent of the devil; and yet, when the same man, with his companions, gave way to sleep in the time of our Lord's agony, he only said, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?" He never with-held needful admonitions, but administered them in such a way as to shew that his love to his disciples was not abated by their infirmities. He taught and enjoined every needful duty, and yet he did not require from them such frequent fastings as those of which John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees boasted. The reason for this part of his behaviour was, that his disciples were yet but children in their attainments, and that the time was not yet come when such fastings were requisite. Mark, ii. 18.—22. "He fed his flock like a shepherd; he gathered his sheep with his arm; he carried the lambs in his bosom; he gently led those that were with young. The bruised reed he did not break; the smoaking flax he did not quench." He behaved with all that meekness of wisdom which became the Author of our salvation, the great pattern of all that is amiable and condescending. Thus he still acts towards his people: thus he acts towards us who have the inspection of the souls of our fellow-mortals; thus he acts towards those whom he has placed under our inspection, if we have ever seen the glory and beauty of the meekness and

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and gentleness of Christ, we will endeavour to recommend his laws to all around us, by making it to appear, that, according to our measure, we are changed into the same image.

HAVING thus shewn, that the apostle, with his usual wisdom, requires parents to shew forth the meekness and gentleness which becomes the followers of Christ to their children, whilst they endeavour to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" and having recommended the leading duties necessary to be practised by Christians, in the holy education of their children, I shall conclude this discourse with an address, first to children, and then to parents.

1. From what has been said, you who are children must not infer, that your parents are to blame when they do not gratify your humours, or when they administer the rod of correction at times, or in a degree that you may think unnecessary. You are not so wise as your parents. They know far better than you do what methods of behaviour are best calculated for your advantage. It does not, at least, become you to think otherwise. You are apt to be partial to yourselves; and in nineteen instances out of twenty you will mistake in judging for yourselves against them, in your own favour. A modest child will be, for the most part, disposed to think that his parents treat him as well as he ought to be treated, although he cannot discern the reasons of their conduct.

I confess there are too many instances in which parents violate the rule of the apostle, which I have been endeavouring to explain; and there are some instances in which they may violate it so palpably, that

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children themselves must see it, unless they should seal up their eyes. Jonathan could not but see that Saul did not act the part of a father to him, when he loaded him with bitter words, and threw the javelin against him. But, remember that your duty to your parents does not lose its obligation by their bad behaviour. They are your parents still. The fifth commandment is still in force. It is harder to observe it, but it must be observed, if you mean not to transgress the laws of your heavenly Father, who surely never treated you harshly.

A certain Roman, in the days of Paganism, called Titus Manlius, was extremely ill treated by his father, for no other reason but a defect in his speech. A tribune of the people brought an accusation against the father before the people, who hated him for his imperious conduct, and were determined to punish him with severity. The young man came one morning very early from his father's country-farm, where he was forced to live in the style of a slave, and, finding out the house of the tribune who had impeached his father, compelled him to swear that he would immediately drop the prosecution. Oaths being at that time held inviolable in Rome, the tribune declared before the people, that he withdrew his charge against old Manlius, because his son Titus had obliged him to promise upon oath that he would carry it no farther. The people, charmed with the filial piety of Titus to an unnatural father, not only forgave the old man, but next year advanced his generous son to the supreme honours of the state. Here you see how men, guided only by the light of nature, approved and admired filial love to an unpe-

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rious father. How inexcuseable, then, will you be, if, under the light of divine revelation, you cannot, for the sake of Christ, who died for you when you were his enemies, behave dutifully to relations who do not behave dutifully to you?

Did Jonathan rebel against his father for affronting him in the most outrageous manner, and seeking the blood of a friend whom he loved as his own soul? No: Jonathan speaks in a becoming manner of his father to David, when he was forced to acknowledge his injustice, and fought and fell by his side in the fatal battle of Gilboa. If he had not continued to behave with propriety to a harsh father, David would not have found reason to say in his funeral elegy, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

You have an infinitely nobler example than Jonathan, to teach you to behave well to friends that give you too good reason to be dissatisfied with their conduct. You have the example of our suffering Redeemer. He called the apostles his friends and his brethren; yet they all forsook him, and fled, when he was suffering for them. But did he desist from his redeeming work? did he abate in his love? Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end, and gave them the brightest displays of his love at the very time when they dealt deceitfully with him, like the stream of brooks that pass away.

Seek grace from God to behave dutifully to every friend that behaves undutifully to you, and you shall in no wise be unrewarded. Consider what Peter says of the duty of servants to bad masters. May it not be

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be applied to the duties of children to parents, and to the duties of every other relation, where harsh severity on the one part takes place of that gentleness which the nature of the relation requires? "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. If, when ye do well, and suffer, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps," 1 Pet. ii. 18.—25.

2. I might now dismiss the subject with a very short appeal to the consciences of those who are parents, whether there is any thing in the present life to which you are bound more carefully to attend, than to the duties which are here enjoined by the authority of Christ? But I will yet beg your patience a little longer, that I may say something more on your children's behalf. Their souls are exceedingly precious. If, by a few more arguments, I can prevail on any parents to do what they can for the salvation of their children, the patience of the whole assembly will be well bestowed, and well recompensed. If a single child in the assembly had fallen down dead, like Eutychus, from the loft, would you think your time ill bestowed, if you should all wait together a full hour, to see if any of you could do any thing that might be a means of restoring him to life?

I need not exhort you separately, 1. To beware of provoking your children to wrath; and, 2. To be careful about training them up for God. When you

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are exhorted to bring them up for God, you are exhorted at the same time to shew them all that kindness which is so necessary to sweeten your instructions and reproofs. When the physician prevails on you to administer some bitter drug to your child, he will not need many words to persuade you to cover it over with some palatable ingredient.

1. For God's sake, who has commanded you to "bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," neglect not this comprehensive duty. Are you Christians? Then you are the servants of God; and what has the servant to do but what his master requires? Every good servant will chearfully endeavour to execute the commandments of a good master.

The least intimation of the will of God will certainly be regarded by all that join themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants. But the commandment in our text is certainly to be considered as one of the greatest commandments. What doth your gracious Master require from you, but that you should promote his glory to the utmost of your power, by working out your own salvation, and by contributing your influence to promote the salvation of your fellow-sinners? those especially who are under your authority. Say not, 'If I work out my own salvation, what more can be required from me?' You cannot work out your own salvation, if you are not deeply concerned about the salvation of your children. If God work in you both to will and to do, you will feel ardent desires to promote the salvation of your fellow-men; and these desires will not sleep in your bosoms.

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bosoms. They will be expressed in earnest endeavours, where there is a probability that these endeavours will not be in vain in the Lord.

Attend, all ye who call yourselves the people of the Lord, unto one of his laws which I am going to recite in your ears. It is a law which he hath established in his church, that the glory of his name might be advanced in every age, and transmitted by every present generation to every succeeding generation: "He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children." This, certainly, is not one of those temporary laws which were to be abolished at the time of reformation. If we surname ourselves by the name of Israel, we will certainly acknowledge that this law of the God of Jacob demands our most attentive regard.

What is the most earnest desire of every Christian? Is it not that he may be enabled to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing? If so, let it be remembered, that the way of pleasing God is to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. And this is certainly an eminent part of his revealed will, that we should endeavour to train up our children for his service. How well he is pleased with obedience to his will in this point, is plain from the gracious words spoken concerning Abraham, Gen. xviii. 18. 19. Abraham was the friend of God, and God would hide none of all those secrets from him, which it might be of use to him to know. But, how did it appear that Abraham was the friend of God? "Shall I hide from Abraham," said the Lord,

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" that which I do, seeing I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do judgement and justice, that I may bring upon Abraham that which I have spoken of him." Abraham's children that were chiefly to enjoy and improve his instructions were not yet born; but God knew that Abraham would command them, as soon as it was possible to command them, to keep the way of the Lord; and God will not suffer Abraham to go unrewarded at that time, for what he was afterwards to do. Many good works had Abraham already done for God, and yet God mentions none of them. The God who knows all things, knew that he would command his children, and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord. This instance of his piety is singled out from all others by God, when he designed to do him honour, and to reward his piety with a distinguished token of his friendship. Think not within yourselves that Abraham is your father, if you do not the works of Abraham; or that Christ will acknowledge you as his friends, if you keep not this important commandment, of bringing up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. By obeying it, you not only prove your fidelity in one part of your duty, but, as far as lies in you, you cause the commandments of the Lord to be observed by your children after you. By neglecting it, you are chargeable with innumerable acts of disobedience in one, because the iniquities of your children, the consequences of your neglect, will be justly placed to your account.

2. I urge you to perform this duty from a regard to

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to your children. You love them. But how do you shew your love to them? Is it only by providing for them those things that are necessary for their bodies? But, wherein are you better than the most stupid or ferocious animals, if your views, either for yourselves or for your children, are confined within such narrow bounds? Do not even tigers and lionesses provide what is needful for the subsistence of their young? Perhaps you say, that you educate them to be useful and accomplished members of society, by giving them instruction in arts or sciences. This is certainly good in its place. But what do you more than heathens, if you do not likewise teach them to fear God? Or do you not rather come short of the heathens, who used to train up their children in the knowledge and worship of the gods of their fathers?

You know that your children were born in a state of sin and misery, and that it would have been good for them never to have been born, if they are never recovered from that state. None can recover them from it but God, who has appointed parental instruction and discipline as one of the principal means for this purpose. If you do not apply this mean, what obligation are they under to you for giving them a life, which, for any thing that you will do to prevent it, must be miserable beyond expression through endless ages? If you saw them ready to be cast into a burning fiery furnace, what would you not do to save them? Would you not part with every shilling of your property, with the clothes on your back, almost with your lives, to buy them a pardon, if they were condemned by human laws to the flames? Yea, such

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flames soon exhaust their power to torment. The flames of hell are eternal, and all sinners must dwell with these everlasting burnings, who are not washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, whose ordinary method of operation is not by immediate inspiration, but by that knowledge of the truth which is obtained through the means appointed by himself. No doubt, the Spirit of God can work by other means than parental instructions, or without means, if he pleases. But God can likewise provide food and raiment for children without the help of their parents, or he could feed us all with bread from heaven, as he fed the children of Israel in the desart; and yet no man will neglect the ordinary means of providing for himself, or for his family, unless he is deprived of the use of his understanding.

Would you not be very diligent in labouring for your families, if you saw a rational prospect of providing a rich estate for them by the blessing of God upon your industry? No man can have a more rational prospect of laying up a rich portion for his children by his utmost industry, than Christians have of being instrumental in the deliverance of those children whom they train up for God, from the power of darkness, that, being translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, they may possess the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away. Will you be more careful to provide for the fruit of your bodies the meat that perisheth, than the meat which endureth unto eternal life? Are you more anxious to see them in possession of enjoyments which cannot

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cannot continue with them seventy or eighty years, and probably will not continue with them half that time, than to be blessed with the transporting hope of seeing them in possession of those eternal pleasures which are at the right-hand of God; of those pleasures which were purchased, not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ? What, then, must we think of your temper of mind? Are you to be ranked with those who mind earthly things, or with those who have their conversation in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour? with those who look at the things which are seen, and are temporal, or with those who look at the things which are not seen, and are eternal? Judge for yourselves.

I know what some will think, although, perhaps, they will not say it. They love their children very well, but they see that the duties recommended to them would put them to a great deal of trouble, and the success of their endeavours is very uncertain. They would gladly submit to all the toil, if it were certain that their children would obtain all those advantages from it which have been mentioned. But good parents have sometimes bad children, after all the pains they can bestow upon them, and therefore they will leave it to God to deal as he pleases with their own children; only using such means to instruct them in their duty, as other people around them use.

Why do you grudge the trouble of doing your duty to your children? Did you ever hope to bring up a family without trouble? You certainly read the Bible before you married your wives, and heard Paul telling

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telling you, that those persons who wished to have wives, or husbands, must expect trouble in the flesh. Is trouble to be grudged only when it is intended to serve the best purposes in the world? You must have some trouble while you live in a troublesome world. But no troubles are so well recompensed with pleasure and advantage, as those which are chearfully endured in the service of God. Indeed, if we are faithful servants to God, our troubles will be turned into pleasures. Love to Rachel made Jacob's service of Laban pleasant, although he was exposed to the scorching heats of the day, to the freezing colds of the night, yea, to what is more grievous than both, the ill usage of a hard uncle. Will not love to Christ, and love to your children, make those labours pleasant, which are designed to promote the glory of Christ in the salvation of your children?

But here, you will say, lies the hardship. "What reason have I to hope that my children will receive any saving benefit?" I say, on the other side, what knowest thou, O man! whether thou shalt save thy children? If this is not a sufficient motive for trying it, Paul was a bad reasoner, although he was taught by a greater master than Gamaliel. I confess that your labours may be unsuccessful; but you must grant that it is very possible, if not highly probable, that they may be successful. If they are not successful with all your children, they may be with some. "I know Abraham, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they will keep the way of the Lord." Well do we know that many of Abraham's children after him did not keep the way of the Lord. The number of his natural seed that

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that kept the way of the Lord, has not hitherto been nearly equal to the number which has not kept it. And yet, in God's own estimation, his labours have been crowned with glorious success.

Perhaps those very children which, at present, cause to your minds the greatest uneasiness by their perverseness, may yet be your greatest comforts, if you persist, against discouragements, in doing your duty. The woman of Canaan saw her desire at last upon her daughter, although she met with greater discouragements in the means she used for obtaining her cure, than you have yet met with in your endeavours to do good to the souls of all your children together. The great Augustine, in his younger days, was a Manichee, (one who ascribed the work of creation to the devil). He was a libertine in his conduct, and cost his mother many tears, and many prayers; but she was told by her pious friends, that the child of so many prayers and tears could not be lost; which was accordingly verified to her happy experience. Perhaps from the day that John the divine died, there has not been a greater man in the church than Augustine.

If you should lie down in the grave without seeing any happy effects of your instructions, you may hear of them in another world. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, was no doubt instructed with all possible care by his father, and by the prophet Isaiah. "The father to the children," says Hezekiah, "shall declare thy truth." His own son, however, did not know the Lord for a long time after his father's death. But the Lord sent upon him sore affliction, to put him in mind of what he learned from his father; and

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" then Manasseh," though formerly the worst of men, " knew the Lord that he was God." When he was among the thorns, he knew and called to mind the way of finding mercy, for he had learned it in the days of childhood, although he had long forgotten it.

Although your own immediate children should derive little benefit from your dealings with them, your grandchildren may. So much knowledge of religion may be transmitted to your descendants as may have little effect on one generation, but a saving effect on another; for religion, kept up in the knowledge of it, though useless to those that hold the truth without feeling its power, may be transmitted by them to those whom the grace of God may enable to make a better improvement of it. We do not read of the good effects of Abraham's instructions upon Ishmael; though, from the expression of his being gathered to his people, and from the prayers of Abraham for him, which were graciously answered by God, we may with some probability infer that he died a saint, Gen. xvii. xxv. We do not read of any good effects of Isaac's instructions upon Esau. But we know, that the posterity of Ishmael and of Esau lived in Arabia, where the knowledge and practice of true religion seem to have been still preserved amongst the descendants of Abraham, and of his friends, when other nations were generally, if not universally idolaters. " Who knoweth not in all these," says Job, " that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" And elsewhere he speaks of the worship of the sun and moon, the earliest species of idolatry, as a crime to be punished by the judges; which may indeed mean, that it is a crime which will

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will certainly be punished by God, the Judge of the universe, (who is frequently spoken of in the plural number). But, at any rate, this, and many other passages in the speeches of Job and his friends, make it evident that the country where they dwelt was very far from being destitute of the knowledge or fear of the true God. And the names of Eliphaz, Teman, Buz, leave little room to doubt whence the friends of Job had learned religion.

What knowest thou, O man! whether thou shalt save thy children, or whether thou shalt be instrumental in the salvation of thy grandchildren, and of their children, to the tenth and twentieth generation? Was not Jeroboam the plague and the curse of his people from generation to generation? It is highly probable, that many of their descendants are, to this day, practising those idolatries which he taught their fathers, or other worse idolatries, to which they were led of course, when they were driven from following the Lord. It is to be confessed, that the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge, has ordinarily a greater influence upon men, than those holy instructions which are drawn from the scripture; because, through the corruption of human nature, sin pleases men more than holiness. Yet the grace of God can give that efficacy to good instructions, which will render them the seed of holiness to many succeeding generations. Abraham's endeavours to transmit religion to his posterity, seemed to have lost their effect during the course of many generations; and yet God, by the unseen workings of his providence, preserved the knowledge of his doctrines from being utterly extinguished amongst his posterity, and

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and often revived his work in the midst of the years of apostacy. Divine grace can certainly give that permanency to the effect of instructions that are well-pleasing in his sight, which the corrupt bias of the human heart gives to the influence of error and wickedness; and therefore we ought, for the sake of generations yet unborn, for the sake of generations to be born hundreds of years hence, to take care what education we give to our children, and what example we set them. The effect of our conduct towards our children may operate upon their children to remote ages. If we train them up in ignorance and irreligion, it is probable that they will transmit ignorance and impiety to their children also, and to their children's children. If we train them up in the fear of God, we may be instruments, under divine influence, of preserving the knowledge of God in our land, till that happy period come, when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea. Our instructions and example may contribute to that glorious revival of religion which is to take place in the latter days, although it should yet be removed from us to the distance of two hundred years. It is a question whether we shall live to see that happy period of the church, but we daily pray that it may come. Our works and our prayers are inconsistent with one another, if we do not endeavour to sow that seed which, in the last days, will spring up so abundantly. If we are in heaven when that period comes, it will double our joy to know, that any thing which we did whilst we were in the world has contributed to effect such a happy change. This, I think, we may freely infer from

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from what our Lord says to his disciples, John, iv. 36. —38. concerning the advantages which his disciples derived from the labours of their predecessors, and the joy which will be felt by sowers and reapers together, when the harvest is gathered in.

8. Let your own comfort and advantage in the effect of your labours, excite you to make full proof of all that can be done for the salvation of your children.

Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is grown up, he will be wise; and what joy can exceed that of a father in the wisdom of his son, especially when his own instructions and example have greatly contributed to make him wise? Will not such children be the crown of their parents, both in this world, and at the appearance of Jesus Christ?

Allowing, what may be true, although we hope otherwise, that your children should remain to the end blind and hardened, after all that you can do for their souls, your labour is not lost. You shall have your reward. The reward of Christ's servants is according to their work, not according to their success, 1 Cor. iii. 13. 14. This surely may satisfy you, when it satisfied Christ in a like case. "I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my reward is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Whilst you are in this world, your compassion for your perishing children will, indeed, greatly abate your comfort: but, in this world, whilst they live, you cannot certainly know that your labour will always remain uncrowned with success. If they should visibly or

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in their iniquities through their own folly, your bowels of compassion must be greatly troubled within you: but the pain you feel will not be, by a thousand times, so distressing as your self-tormenting reflections would be, in the consciousness that their perdition must be in part imputed to yourselves. David mourned bitterly the fate of his unhappy son Absalom; but, from some of his last compositions, Psal. xviii. lxxxii. 2 Sam. xxiii. we may justly infer, that he recovered his wonted chearfulness of spirit and joy in the Lord. We have no reason to think that Eli, if he had lived many years after the death of Hophni and Phinehas, would ever have enjoyed a day's happiness. The assurance of heaven to himself could scarcely have made a man happy on earth, whose sons had perished through his neglect. There will be no sorrow in heaven. But, if it were possible that any grief could enter into the abodes of bliss, I believe it would seize upon those men, some of whom may have a humble place in those dwellings, whose children had perished through their negligence, or the influence of their bad example. Although parents obtain repentance for their own faults, they cannot give it to their children, to repair their former errors.

4. Your duty to your parents, or to your remote ancestors, who transmitted unto you the truths of God, binds you to transmit their religion to their posterity. Many of them jeoparded their lives in defence of the truth, that it might come down unadulterated to you. Read the history of the contendings of your fathers in the various reformation-periods of our church, and especially in days of bloody persecutions. Will not their perils, their solemn covenants, their

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their prisons, their scaffolds, bear witness against you at the day of judgement, if it is found, that, by your negligence or misbehaviour, you have done what was in your power to make all their generous efforts useless to their posterity? Do you wish to resemble those wretched kings of Judah, who did not that which was right in the sight of God, like David their father?

But I have more powerful arguments still to enforce parental duty. They are taken from the redemption purchased for us by Christ. No consideration will be more effectual to impress us with a sense of the importance of our own salvation, or of the salvation of our children and friends, than those which are drawn from the works that Christ performed, and the sufferings that he endured for our salvation. Think, careless sinners, of our Lord's deep abasement. Why did he come into our world, clothed with a mortal body? Why did he endure pain, and shame, and the wrath of God? Was it not to obtain salvation for us? And will you, hereafter, think it a matter of small concern, whether you share in his salvation or not? Will you account it a hardship that you must put yourself to some trouble to promote the salvation of those whom you love? O that the mind which was in Christ were in us also! We would, like Paul, be willing to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ, with eternal glory. You know not, indeed, whether your children are elected or not, till the fruits of their election appear in their lives. But do you think that Paul could distinguish

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tinguish the elect, before their effectual calling, any more than yourselves? You do not defer their baptism till you are assured of their election. Instruct, admonish, correct them; pray for them, and your work shall be rewarded.

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THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON MILITARY COURAGE.

A SERMON, PREACHED IN AUTUMN 1803.

DAN. xi. 32.

But the people that do know their God, shall be strong, and do exploits.

THIS is a time of alarm and anxiety. We have sinned against the Lord, and he threatens us with wars of a kind to which we have not been accustomed. In former wars, a few amongst us were called out to risk their lives by sea, or in distant lands, against our enemies. The greater part of our countrymen lived in peace amidst those rumours of distant wars which were carried on for the security of distant possessions. But now, a powerful enemy threatens to invade our island, and may spread terror and devastation, to what extent we know not. Our inexperience of the alarms and miseries of war will render them more dreadful, if an angry God should be pleased to visit us with this calamity.

It is the duty of all who are, or who may be called by government to hazard their lives in the high places of

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of the field, for the preservation of our country, to furnish themselves with all necessary qualifications for fighting with spirit against those enemies that seek our destruction.

Many are, at present, learning the use of military weapons; and it is to be hoped that, if they should be called to use them, they will quit themselves like men. Yet they may find it a great disadvantage to be under a necessity, in their entrance upon a manner of life wholly new, to encounter men long used to arms, and often crowned with victory. But our text informs us of a qualification which may fit them to appear in the field of battle with the courage of heroes, and to encounter the most formidable enemies, without fear of the consequences. They *that know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.*

These words are part of a prophecy which relates, as some think, to a very important period of the history of the Jews, when the Maccabees, at the head of handfuls of men, destroyed great armies of aliens, and were the happy instruments, in the hands of Divine Providence, of saving their church and nation from destruction, and of raising it to a degree of consideration and renown, equal to what they had enjoyed under the administration of some of those good kings that sprung from David. Concerning this glorious period the prophet Zechariah speaks, when the Lord says by his mouth, "I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion! against thy sons, O Greece! and made thee as the sword of a mighty man. The Lord of hosts shall defend them, and they shall devour and subdue with sling-stones, and they

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they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar; and the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land."

Others refer this prophecy to the Christian church, and to the courage displayed by the followers of Christ in holding fast his name, and spreading the savour of it all around, in defiance of those Roman tyrants who endeavoured to extirpate Christianity out of the world. This is probably the true application of it; but the doctrine which I propose to consider from this text is clearly founded on the words, to whatever period you refer them:—That the true knowledge of our God will strengthen us for doing exploits. Let us consider,

I. Who they are that know their God.

II. How the knowledge of God strengthens us for doing exploits.

I. WHO they are that know their God.

In the language of scripture, no wicked man knows the Lord: "The sons of Eli," it is said, were "sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord." No drunkard, no fornicator, no covetous person who is an idolater, no hypocrite, no unregenerate man, knows the Lord; "for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Sam. ii. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

But the Lord is known by all the upright; for

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"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments." As soon as Manasseh repented of his wickedness, it is said of him, "Then Manasseh knew the Lord, that he was God," 2 Chron. xxxiii. 13. Psal. cxi. 10.

Those who know the Lord know something concerning the perfections of his nature. It is but a "little portion that they hear of him, and the thunder of his power who can understand?" But they know at least, that he is the Most High over all the earth, glorious in holiness, invariable in justice, irresistible in power, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, abundant in goodness and truth."

They know him to be excellent and amiable in all his perfections, and would abhor themselves if they felt a latent wish that he were any thing else than he is. Some are of such depraved minds, that they think God is altogether like themselves; or of such depraved hearts, that they wish he were changeable, or of less pure eyes than to behold iniquity with detestation. But all who have seen the beauty of the Lord, "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness."

They who know their God know, that although there is but one God, yet there are three persons to whom the glory of deity equally belongs. They know something of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of his Son and Spirit; "for he who denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he who acknowledgeth the Son, hath the Father also," 1 John, ii. 23. Col. ii. 2.

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This knowledge of God is attended with suitable dispositions of heart. All who know God to salvation, trust in him as their God. They believe in his Son as their Saviour, and through him believe on God as their Father, and their everlasting portion; for they know that he is worthy of their confidence, and that to disbelieve his record of eternal life in his Son, would be to make him a liar. They love him with a supreme affection, because they know him to be infinitely the most amiable of beings, and have known and believed his love towards them. They fear and tremble before him, because they know him to be of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that he will not look upon iniquity. They rejoice in his kindness, and count it their glory and joy to call him their God.

They that know their God keep his commandments. Disobedience to his voice they count the worst of all evils. Obedience to him is, in their view, indispensably necessary, because of his indisputable right to rule over them, and the infinite obligations they owe him as their Creator, their constant benefactor, and their Redeemer. "Shalt thou reign," said Jeremiah to Jehoiakim, "because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgement and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him. Was not this to know me? saith the Lord." We cannot give a better proof that we know God, than by serving our generation faithfully, according to the will of God.

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II. How the knowledge of God fits men for doing exploits, is now to be considered.

The word *exploits* is a supplement of our translation. But the words plainly signify, that those who know their God "shall be strong," and do such things as could not be expected from persons not under the influence of a religious principle.

The exploits done by those who know their God must be undoubtedly consistent with justice. Heroical actions have been performed for the gratification of ambition, or other corrupt dispositions of the human heart. But those who know their God would not, for the world, do an unjust action; because they are persuaded that it would be a great loss, on the whole, to gain the whole world, and to lose their own souls, or to risk the loss of their souls, by disobeying God.

But, to defend their country when it is invaded or threatened by cruel enemies, is surely well-pleasing to God, who strictly prohibits all selfishness of spirit, and requires us to make every needful sacrifice, and to encounter every danger, for the safety of those communities of which Divine Providence hath made us members. "What good man ever hesitated," says a celebrated heathen author, "to die for his country?" "God laid down his life for us," says an inspired writer, "and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." By the brethren, John means our brethren in Christ, the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Paul was chearfully ready to lay down his life for the brethren, when he was willing to be offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith. The noble army of martyrs laid down their lives, not only

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only for their heavenly Father, but for their brethren, when they sealed the truth with their blood.

Our brethren according to the faith, and a great multitude of our brethren according to the flesh, ar included in that large community for which some o you, for aught we know, may be called to encounter an enemy who seeks the destruction of all that is dear to us. How cold and selfish must our hearts be, if we shrink from difficulties or dangers necessary to be encountered for their safety! Selfish, did I say? It must be a very misguided selfishness that disposes us to hide ourselves from our own flesh, and to surrender, without a struggle, our own best interests.

But how does the knowledge of our God prepare us for doing what we may be called to do, in the defence of our country, and of ourselves?

1. They that know their God, know his will, and are disposed to do it. And this is one article of the revealed will of God, that we should be ready, when we are called by providence, to defend our king and country, our liberties, and our religion.

"Honour the king." "Be subject to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake." These precepts do not require all of us to be soldiers; but they require all able-bodied men to be ready, at their king's call, to support his government when danger threatens it from intestine or foreign enemies.

In former wars, few men were called to enlist themselves in the king's troops, that did not feel themselves disposed to enter into the military service. Now there is a demand for the service of many, who, in less threatening times, would have chosen to spend their days in the labours of peace; and those who

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are backward to employ that strength which God has given them in the service of their country, desire that others may be burdened, that themselves may be eased. What the revealed will of God in such emergencies is, we may learn from the inspired song of Deborah, in which she censures, with great severity, those tribes of Israel that preferred their own safety to the safety of their country; and highly commends those that stood forward to avert the public danger. "Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people. Out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer; and the princes of Issachar were with Deborah, even Issachar, and also Barak: for the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheep-folds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan; and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea-shore, and abode in his breaches." The cowards of Asher, of Gilead, and Reuben, are consigned to perpetual infamy by the song of the prophetess. The inhabitants of Meroz are laid under a grievous curse, not that they were enemies, but because they did not approve themselves friends to their country. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." The Lord needed not their help against the mighty. He could issue forth his commandments to the stars, or to the rivers, to fight against his enemies. The stars did fight in their courses

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courses against Sisera; and that ancient river, the river Kishon, swept them away. Yet it was his will that his people should testify their regard to himself, by fighting against the enemies of his people and his glory. And he was sore displeased with those who would not venture their lives, when they were called to do it, in his cause. But those who were forward to encounter the enemy are immortalised in this divine poem: "My heart is towards the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people: Bless ye the Lord. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death, in the high places of the field. Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent."

There are some to whom God has not given strength of body, and there are others to whom he has not imparted vigour of mind, to serve their country against its enemies. Cowards were permitted by God to leave the camp of Israel, when a battle was to be fought with their enemies, lest the spirits of their brethren should be infected by their baseness of spirit. There are many others whose services will not be needed. Let all such persons endeavour to compensate their lack of service in the field, by their services at home, and particularly by their prayers for their brethren who may be called to encounter dangers for their safety. But let none of those who willingly offered themselves draw back, if their actual service should be required. Let none be unwilling to perform their engagements. Every man that becomes a soldier engages to observe and execute the orders that are given h[illegible] although

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it may cost him his life; and treachery is no less offensive to God, than dishonourable in the eyes of men.

The difference between those who know their God and other men, is, that most other men will do some things that God requires, but they are not ready for every good work. Where their life, their interest, their credit, may suffer by obeying the will of God, they must be excused; but the lovers of God delight to shew their obedience, where self-denial must be practised. You remember that first principle of the doctrine of Christ, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This requisition extends to life itself, if it is our duty to part with it. Christ died upon a cross for us, and we must be ready to die upon a cross for him. He died on his cross for our salvation; we must be ready to die a violent and painful, and even a shameful death, in obedience to his will, when we cannot avoid sin by sparing ourselves. When Peter said to our Lord, "Far be it from thee, Lord, to die upon a cross," he was greatly displeased with his real friend, as if he had been his worst enemy, because he dissuaded him from giving his life for us; and we ought to consider those men as the agents of Satan, who persuade us to save our lives at the expence of our duty.

It was the duty, some will say, of the blessed martyrs, chearfully to surrender their bodies to the gallows, or to the devouring flames, for the name of Christ; but it is a very different thing to die in a battle fighting for our country. What concern has Christ with the quarrels of nations?

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But whenever you venture your lives in obedience to the will of God, your sufferings are endured for Christ. Those who fight merely for their pay, or to avoid the shame attached to cowardice, or to gain the praise of valour, have the reward they seek. But if you fight because God requires you to defend your king, your country, your religious liberties, you walk in the spirit of those martyrs, who overcame the dragon by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. Paul places in the same class of heroes the men who by faith subdued kingdoms, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens, with those who wrought righteousness, quenched the violence of fire, and stopped the mouths of lions. When David risked his life against the enemies of his country, his conduct was no less acceptable to God than that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they yielded their bodies to the burning fire, and of Daniel, when he exposed himself to the lions, that they might worship no other gods but their own God.

2. They that know their God are strengthened to do exploits, by their confidence in God as their own God. "They that know his name will put their trust in him;" and "through him they will do valiantly."

Our confidence in God is founded on the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. "He is the way: no man cometh to the Father but by him." Now, when we believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and life everlasting, what have we to fear? Our souls are bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God. We may die, but we cannot be hurt, because our sins are forgiven; and

forgiven, death itself cannot destroy us. It is a consciousness of guilt that disqualifies us for dangerous duties. We are sinners, and therefore every thing is terrible that brings death to our view. Were we delivered from apprehensions of the wrath of God, we would not be greatly moved at the thought of any thing that man can do to us. And how can guilty creatures be delivered from such disquieting apprehensions, but by faith in the blood of Christ? All other means of deliverance are delusions; but "shall not the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge our consciences from dead works," and inspire us with a confidence in God, not to be shaken by those whose power goes no farther than the killing of our bodies?

When we place our trust in Christ as our Saviour, we trust in God as our Father, our friend, "the horn of our salvation, and our high tower." Having such trust through Christ, God-ward, what have we to fear? "The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies, and my foes, rose up against me to eat my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, mine heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.—Truly my soul waiteth upon God; from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock, and my salvation. He is my defence, I shall not be greatly moved," Psal. xxvii. 1.—4. lxii. 1. 2. 6. 7.

Believers in God have a sure ground for their confidence. He is an everlasting rock. His mercy endureth

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dureth for ever. His faithfulness is to all generations; and it is pledged in many great and precious promises scattered through every part of his word. They that know the name of God delight in his word, and meditate upon it day and night; and there are no parts of the word of God in which they delight to meditate more than on the promises, which are yea and amen in Christ, to the glory of God by them. Those promises especially demand our attention, which are best suited to our necessities. In the day of fear and danger, these promises of support, of deliverance, of an happy event to every thing that interests us, demand our attention: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.—He shall cover thee with his feathers; under his wings shalt thou trust: his faithfulness shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.—Because thou hast made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, thine habitation, there shall no evil befal thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling," Isa. xxvi. 3. Psal. xci. 4. Having such promises as these, may we not "boldly say, The Lord is our helper, we will not be afraid what man can do unto us?"

We trust God with the care of our souls, and hope in his mercy for everlasting life. And ought we not to trust him with our bodies also? We believe that, in his own time, he will quicken our mortal bodies

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and bring them again from the lower parts of the earth. And may we not trust his providence for the preservation of our bodies in this world, as long as it is necessary for ourselves or for our families that we should remain in the land of the living? "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." He will not suffer them to die when it is better for them to live. Long life is one of the promises made to those who honour their father and mother; and, according to the sound doctrine of our Shorter Catechism, these words, "father and mother," include all our lawful superiors. "He shall call on me," says God concerning the believer in his name, "and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation."

Your Shorter Catechism teaches you to understand such promises as these with the limitation, that, "as far as it is for God's glory and our own good," we are to expect the literal accomplishment of them. And who would desire longer life than God sees to be for his own glory, and our good? If the promises were not to be understood with this limitation, they would be threatenings in some cases, and promises in others.

3. The people that do know their God, have learned patiently to do his will.

Faith and patience are sometimes conjoined in the language and exhortations of the scripture. He who knows God, and trusts in him, will, "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality." Whilst we are in this bad world, we have need of patience; especially when we are called to extraordinary exertion in the service of God,

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or of our country. None can hope to do exploits, that is unqualified to bear those things that are unpleasant to the flesh. Hardness must be endured by every good soldier of Jesus Christ. "If we faint in the day of adversity, our strength is but small."

When a man is called to encounter the enemies of his country, he may be exposed to sore fatigues, to cold, to hunger and thirst, to wounds, to captivity, to death. But if we know the Lord, we are prepared for these, and for every other evil that may meet us in the course of our duty. None of all these things can befal us without the providence of God. "He keepeth all the bones of his saints: not one of them is broken;" or, if any of them is broken, the pain and loss will be abundantly compensated; "for we know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose."

Joab was not the best of men, but he fought gallantly for his king and country; and the speech that he made before one of his battles, is recorded for the instruction of all that may be called to perilous exploits: "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth him good." It is for our country and our God that we fight. We may lose our lives in the quarrel, but not without divine permission. Whatever we suffer, it is for him, and from him. It is his to determine the issue of the battle, and the fate of every soldier engaged in it. What Israelite would not rather die at the commandment of the Lord, and in his service, than live in peace and pleasure, by a cowardly desertion of duty? Many

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Many of the holy martyrs suffered dreadful torments before they left the world. Their enemies wished that they might feel themselves die. But they knew in whom they trusted, and were persuaded that he put all their tears into his bottle. They took pleasure in suffering for him, and thus "they overcame the dragon by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Blessed and holy are they who have thus learned to be moved by none of the evil things of life, nor to count life itself dear to them, that they may finish their course with joy, whatever that course of duty is which the providence of God hath marked out for them. Who can doubt whether crowns, bright as those of the martyrs, shall be set upon the heads of such men as Colonel Gardiner, whom faith in God, and a sense of duty, exposed in the field of battle to a bloody death?

4. The people that do know their God, are prepared for extraordinary services, by the ordinary course of their service to God.

When men are daily adding sin to sin by obstinate impenitence, they prepare thorns and briars to tear their consciences, when an evil day comes. How can such men be unappalled, when they find themselves placed in a situation that exposes them to a premature death, heavy laden with iniquities, which will sink them down into destruction and perdition? But those who know their God, walk in the way of righteousness and peace. It is their daily endeavour to approve themselves unto God. They may stumble, they may fall; but, through the grace of God, they rise again, and stand upright, and go on in the strength

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of the Lord God. They walk in the light, as God is in the light; and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth them from all sin. When, through the power of corruption and temptation, they transgress the law of their God, they are enfeebled, and can do no exploits. Sampson sinned with Delilah, and was left in the hands of his enemies, who put out his two eyes. It is to be hoped that he sincerely repented; and he was enabled, at his death, to destroy more of the enemies of the Lord, than he had done through the whole course of his life.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," and to restore our confidence in his mercy. David had grievously sinned in the matter of Uriah, and was long feeble, and sore broken; but when he acknowledged his offence, the Lord forgave the iniquity of his sin, and inspired him with such confidence in God, that when the greater part of the nation had rebelled against him, he could call God his "shield and his glory, and the lifter up of his head." "I will not be afraid," said that holy man, "of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about." He knew that the rebellion of Absalom was the chastisement of his great offence, but he knew that his sin was pardoned. "For this cause shall every one that is godly pray unto the Lord in a time when he may be found. Surely in the floods of great waters, they shall not come nigh unto him," Psal. iii. xxxii.

Happy are they who are enabled to walk without stumbling in God's ways; and happy are they who, having stumbled, are recovered to repentance; for "the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and

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his ears are open unto their cry." They are compassed about with his favour as with a shield. David, in his great deliverances, saw God's gracious acceptance of his works. These deliverances were the fruits of God's love; but they were likewise answers to his prayers, and gracious rewards of his endeavours to please God. "He delivered me, because he delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me."

All that know their God, have learned to keep up an intercourse with him by prayer; and in the time of distress and danger, they pray more earnestly. Great are the victories which prayer hath obtained. Let soldiers read the history of the wars of Joshua with the Amalekites and Canaanites, the history of the wars of the Judges of Israel, of David, of Asa, of Jehoshaphat, of Hezekiah, of Abijah the son of Rehoboam, of the Reubenites, and Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh, with the Hagarenes, that they may learn the value of prayer. It is a shield and a sword, of which we may say, as David said of the sword of Goliath, "There is none like it," Exod. xv. Josh. vii. Judges throughout. Psal. xviii. 2 Chron. xiii. xiv. xx. xxxii. Isa. xxxvii.

War is one of God's sore judgements inflicted upon nations for their sins. Those who know their God are mourners for the dishonour done to God by the sins of the land; they humble themselves under his mighty hand. Those who thus glorify God when others dishonour him, are the persons chiefly marked out for safety, and are often honoured to be the preservers of their country, Ezra, v. Josh. vii. Amos, vii.—We may therefore observe,

5. That

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5. That the people who do know their God are strong to do exploits, because God is their helper.

The Lord is good unto all, but he loves all that walk in his ways. "He is their arm every morning, their salvation also in the day of trouble." How were all the heroes of Israel, in ancient times, enabled to do those mighty works for which they are held in everlasting remembrance? The Lord was with them. They were strong in his strength. He protected them by the shield of his salvation. Thus they did great things, and prevailed against all their enemies. By his strength, Jonathan, with one companion, attacked a whole garrison, and put to flight the great army of the Philistines. By God, David was enabled to kill the giant that seemed himself to be an army. "By thee," says that holy man, "I have run through a troop, and by my God have I leaped over a wall," Psal. xviii.

Although we are not now to expect miraculous interpositions of divine providence, yet the management of all affairs is, as much as ever, under the direction of the providence of God, which will suffer none of his promises to fail of their accomplishment. God is as really and effectually our protector, as he was the saviour of David, and of Abraham. Have we turned to God through Christ Jesus, from every evil way? Then he is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death; and when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need not fear any evil. He will be with us: he will help us: he will strengthen us: he will uphold us with the right-hand of his righteousness, Isa. xli. Psal. xxiii.

What

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What shall we do as the conclusion of the whole matter?

1. Seek the knowledge of God. Let those who yet know not God seek the knowledge of his excellency, of his grace, of his will. Let those who know the Lord seek more and more of that precious knowledge, which will prepare them to encounter every danger, to perform the hardiest duties, and to endure every evil occurrence. You surely desire eternal life; but this is life eternal, to know the Lord, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

Use the means of knowledge with which God hath furnished you in great plenty. Pray for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, to give efficacy to the means. Improve, in holy practice, that knowledge which you have obtained; and endeavour to spread the good knowledge of the Lord around you, that your friends and neighbours may, with you, glorify your Father who is in heaven, Prov. ii. 1.—9. Eph. i. 16. 17.

2. If any of you say that you know God, consider by what course of actions you ought to verify your pretensions; for if you say that you know God, and keep not his commandments, you are liars.

Great exploits were done by the heroes of God's people. Great exploits were performed by the holy martyrs. You may not be called to walk in their steps, but you must walk in the same spirit. Your knowledge must not sleep in your bosoms, but appear in such works as God requires from you, in your respective stations and circumstances. Works must be done by you, which none can do unless God be with him.

You must cut off right hands and right feet, when they

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they make you to offend. You must crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. You must wrestle with mightier enemies than flesh and blood. You must overcome the world. The fearful shall have their part in the lake of fire burning with brimstone. The overcomer alone shall sit down with Christ on his throne, even as he overcame, and sat down with his Father on his throne.

But how shall you fight the good fight of faith? How shall you obtain the victory, in a contest so unequal, of flesh and blood with spiritual wickednesses?

The scripture teaches us how we ought to fight this good fight. It is the fight of faith. We must resist the devil, stedfast in the faith, says Peter, 1 Peter, v. We must overcome the world by faith, says John, 1 John, v. 4. We must by faith in the cross of Christ mortify our sinful lusts, Rom. vi. 3.—6.

To faith we must join hope, righteousness, truth, and other Christian graces, which are spiritual weapons given us by God to fight his battles, Eph. vi.

The word of God is a magazine of spiritual weapons, by which we may be enabled to repel every attack of our enemies. The martyrs overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. Christ himself conquered the wicked one in the desart by the word of truth, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps, Matth. iv. 1.—10.

3. To animate us to such exploits as we may be called to perform, let us call to remembrance the exploits performed by believers in ancient times. Paul puts us in mind of the many mighty works done through

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through faith, that we may be ready, when we are called by divine providence, to follow their example. Are you called to practise virtue and holiness, amidst the opposition to be expected from a crooked and perverse generation? Remember Noah, who maintained his integrity in the midst of a whole world in arms against God. Are you called to forsake your country and your friends for works of piety? Remember Abraham. Remember the same blessed patriarch, when you are called to resign to God the dearest in your family. When you are called to encounter death, the last enemy, remember those patriarchs who died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.

Are you called to risk your lives in battle? Remember Abraham, who, with a little army, fought bravely and successfully against four victorious kings, to rescue his beloved nephew. If you fight against the enemies of your country, you fight for nearer relations than nephews; for all that are dear to you in the flesh, and for many that are dear to you in the Lord. Remember Joshua, who spent many of his years in fighting for his people. He had good encouragement from God to fight against the kings of Canaan. "The Lord said to him, As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." But have not we the same encouragement to undertake every perilous duty to which we may be called? Is not the very promise made to Joshua recorded as a ground of faith to us? So we are taught by the apostle Paul, Heb. xiii. 5.—7. If you claim the benefit of this promise, forget not the direction with which it is accompanied: "Only be thou

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thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded thee. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest," Josh. i.

Time would fail us to speak of the wars of Gideon, of Barak, of Jephtha, of David, of Asa, of Hezekiah, and of many other eminent men, whose examples are recorded in the Bible. They fought, and they conquered by faith. Their memorial shall be everlasting; and their example will be followed by the lovers of God, and of his word, as far as duty calls, Heb. xi. 34.—xii. 1.

4. Those who are barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of God ought to consider their ways.

Although you are not all called to do military exploits, you are all called to serve God in your stations; and if you say that you know God, you ought to do such works as are not to be expected from them that know him not.

Consider what those duties are which God requires from persons in your stations and circumstances, what duties particular emergencies may require, and how you may contribute to the good works which you cannot perform in person.

You cannot go as missionaries to spread the light of the gospel among the heathens; but you may be fellow-helpers to them by your contributions and prayers. You are not called to the field of battle; but you may assist the defenders of your country by your chearful payment of those taxes that are necessary for their support, and by your prayers to God that he may cover their heads in the day of battle.

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All that know the Lord love him. All that love him will desire to approve their love by those works that are pleasing in his sight; nor will they grudge to sacrifice their ease, their credit, their comfort, in his service. Even life itself ought not to be held fast when God requires it. Abraham chearfully parted with what was dearer to him than his own life, the life of his beloved Isaac, when God demanded him for a sacrifice. If we call ourselves the children of Abraham, let us walk in his steps.

But, if we are averse to every self-denying duty, we are not Abraham's children, and our pretensions to the knowledge of God are a delusion. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, was convicted of ignorance of God, by his opposite behaviour to his father, Jer. xxii. Let us therefore try our knowledge of God by its fruits. If we bring forth no good fruit, we know not the Lord in truth. Our ignorance of God will be still more evident, if we bring forth much bad fruit. "The tree is known by its fruits; and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

Exploits in the service of Satan indicate not only ignorance of God, but enmity against him. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; purify your hearts, ye double-minded." Seek the pardon of all your iniquities through Christ. Turn from your evil ways, and from your unrighteous thoughts. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Our prayer for you is, "that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being

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being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

You must not imagine that the best means will give you the saving and sanctifying knowledge of God, without divine illumination. Many heard the discourses of him who came from the bosom of the Father to reveal him unto us, and yet continued blind to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. Use means of knowledge with diligence, but trust not to your use of means. Christ is our teacher by his word and Spirit. We must not expect the teaching of his Spirit without his word; and we must not expect saving knowledge from his word without his Spirit. "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit. They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Many such promises are given us, to encourage us to trust in Christ as our Prophet, and to pray that God may open our eyes, that we may behold wonderful things out of his law.

Happy are all they who are taught the good knowledge of God by his Spirit, from his word. "A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength; for, by wise counsel, thou shalt make thy war." *They that know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.*

"There are some," says Paul, "that have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." There are some of the military order, as well as men of other descriptions, that have not the knowledge of God. None know God who dare to profane his name by needless oaths and execrations. Long have our soldiers been in disgrace amongst the nations of Europe

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Europe for this abominable practice of profane swearing. Several hundred years ago, in the days of Joan d'Arc, they were known by a name of ignominy, taken from this vile habit. It is now high time to set our nation free from this disgrace. Gentlemen would reckon themselves degraded by the language of the pit. Ought not the king's servants to behave like gentlemen?

Do they reckon it a sign of bravery to use freedom with the name of God Almighty? If this is bravery, I will tell you another way in which you may distinguish your courage, by shewing that you fear neither God nor man. Speak contemptuously of your king. Let his name be treated by you with as much contempt as ever you shewed to the name of God Almighty. Why do you not make it evident that you fear the gallows as little as the lake of fire and brimstone?

But if you love your king, testify your love by behaving as he wishes you to behave. He is a known enemy to profaneness and immorality.

It is well known, that the greatest libertines in the absence of danger, are commonly the greatest cowards when it is near. And none are more likely to prove cowards in the day of battle, than those who set God at defiance in days of tranquillity. Some talk of a ghost that appeared to Marcus Brutus before the battle of Philippi, and said to him, "I will meet thee again at Philippi." What if your oaths, like so many ghosts, should meet your consciences in the day of battle, and tell you, that every bullet receives its direction from him whom you have wantonly made your enemy?

Licentious

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Licentious behaviour with the female sex is a charge which has been too justly brought against some military men. How inhuman is it to deprive poor virgins, if not of life, of that which is necessary to make life life! If, by exposing them to contempt, and to all the torments of shame and remorse, you embitter their days, you give a deadly stab to their reputation, to their peace, to their souls. You are expected to kill our enemies, not our friends; to kill those men that seek our ruin, not those women whose good offices are necessary to the comfort of our lives.

The true knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, would inspire you with detestation of every vice. Seek the knowledge of the Lord, that you may be preserved from all those evils which would weaken your hands for battle, and fill you with tormenting dread of that world into which a mortal wound would convey you. Be not ashamed of the fear of God. Be ashamed of the base cowardice which disgraces those who are not valiant for the truth upon the earth.

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THE IMPROVEMENT TO BE MADE OF THE ALARM OF WAR.

A SERMON PREACHED AFTER THE LATE FALSE ALARM IN THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND.

JER. iv. 19.

My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul! the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

YOU have perhaps heard of the philosopher's stone, by which every thing that it touched was to be turned into gold. Some men of learning have spent much money and time in vain attempts to find out this fanciful secret. But religion furnishes us with a secret of infinitely greater value. It teaches us to turn the worst things we can meet with into means of promoting our holiness. The least portion of true holiness is of more worth than all the gold in a thousand mines: and, by afflictions, tribulations, terrors, wars, and rumours of war, duly improved, we are made partakers of God's holiness. Jeremiah, if you read him with due attention, will instruct you what improvement you ought to make of the sound

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of the trumpet, and the alarm of war. If we comply with the exhortations addressed to us, as well as to the people of ancient times, by this holy man, we will bless God thousands of ages hence, that ever we heard of those evils which at present fill our minds with terror.

He speaks, in this chapter, of a full wind that was to come from the wilderness against God's people, not to fan nor to cleanse, but to destroy; of armies that were to come from a far country, and to give forth their voice against the cities of Judah. We hear of great armies from a land not far distant, that give forth their voices against us, calling themselves the Army of England, because they are destined to invade and destroy us.

It will serve no great purpose to exclaim against these children of violence and rapine, who breathe out threatenings against their innocent neighbours. Let us rather turn our complaint against ourselves, as we are instructed to do by the prophet: "Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart," Jer. iv. 18.

Was Jeremiah an enemy to his country, when he laid the blame of the calamity upon his own people, and lifted up his voice like a trumpet, to declare unto them their transgressions, and the miseries which they were doomed to suffer? Many reproached him. He was once seized, and imprisoned as a traitor. But he was a warmer friend to his country than the king himself, or any of those who accused him. The dangers and miseries of his country were deeply felt and lamented by him. *My bowels, my bowels!*

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pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace. His grief was very bitter. It pierced his bowels like a sword. His animal frame was put into a violent commotion by the anguish of his spirit. He could not contain his sorrows, but was forced to cry out in the bitterness of his soul. The language in which he expresses his sorrows is almost the same with that which Isaiah and Jeremiah put into the mouths of the Moabites, when they are introduced, bewailing the utter desolation of their native land: "Wherefore, my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kirharesh," Isa. xvi. Jer. xlviii.

I cannot hold my peace. Why does he cry out for sorrow? *Because thou hast heard, O my soul! the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.* The trumpet was not yet sounded by the Chaldeans, or the Jews, yet the prophet heard the sound of it. It reached not only his ears, but his soul. The Lord God opened his ears, by the spirit of prophecy, to hear it; for things to come are things present to him who "declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done."

We too have heard the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war. It was sounded in our ears by the British government, when they called us loudly to arm in our own defence. The trumpet of war has long been sounding in our ears from the coasts of France and Holland. Last week we heard the sound of the trumpet in our streets. The people were troubled at midnight. Many thought that the French ravagers were within a day's march of the town. The volunteers were assembled to march.

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Their wives and friends thought that they were perhaps taking their last farewell. Many houses were filled with lamentation. Many hearts were torn with secret anguish. This particular alarm has happily turned out ungrounded; but the danger is not at an end. Our tranquillity is, by divine mercy, lengthened out. And let us not neglect those precious hours that are yet left us, for preparing to meet our God in the way of his judgements. I shall say something,

I. Of hearing the sound of the trumpet.

II. Of the impression of grief which the hearing of this sound should make.

III. Of the improvement we ought to make of the sound of the trumpet, and of the alarm of war.

I. Of hearing the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war.

1. We ought to have our ears open to the voice of God in the dispensations of his providence. "The Lord's voice," says Micah, "crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom will see thy name: Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it," Mic. vi. 9. Our Lord charges it as an inexcuseable and pernicious folly in the generation with which he lived, that they knew the signs of the weather, and could tell in the evening or morning, whether the weather of the coming day would be foul or fair, but did not know the signs of the times, Matth. xvi. Solomon ascribes a great part of the miseries of mankind to their ignorance of their times: "Because man knoweth not his time, he is like fishes taken in an evil net, or birds caught in the snare."

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Wars in our country have usually been less attended to than in any other country upon earth. The sea separates us from our enemies. They have not set foot on our island in the days of the greatest part of us; and we have not often been roused by the fears of an invasion. The effects of war upon most individuals of the common people have been only a diminution of trade, and a gradual augmentation of taxes; and great multitudes are too selfish to pay much regard to the public concerns, when they see little present danger of much damage to their persons, or their private interests. At present, however, the most stupid and senseless amongst us must be infatuated, if they are not awakened to an apprehension of the threatening aspect of providence. Vast armies are collected by our enemies, with a professed design of invading our peaceful shores. Incredible numbers of vessels are prepared to transport them. High winds sometimes inspire us with anxious fears, lest those ships that blockade the harbours of our enemies should be scattered, and leave an open passage for the fleets and armies that threaten our destruction. God grant that none may be found amongst us like that ancient generation of Israelites, concerning whom it is said, "He hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle; and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart," Isa. xlii. 25.

2. When we hear the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war, we ought to consider the causes of these alarms.

What was the immediate cause of the alarm of last week, we can as yet only guess. But it is of more

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importance

importance to know what the great and first cause is of all those dangers to which we are exposed from the sword of our enemies. Some will ascribe our calamities to unwise counsels in our governors. A far greater number will cry out loudly against French rapacity and tyranny. But religion teaches us to look to an angry God, as the sovereign Ruler of the world, who "forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil: I the Lord do all these things," Isa. xlv. 7. He claims praise, not only for the many good things which he bestows, but for the evils which he inflicts. We observed a day of thanksgiving on occasion of the late peace, and a day of humiliation at the beginning of the present war. We mock God by the observance of such days, if we are not sensible of the great mercy of God in giving us peace, and of his displeasure in turning peace again into war.

The prophets often denounce war as a judgement of God against his people, or against the Gentiles. In publishing such threatenings, they, for the most part, speak of the sins that have provoked God to afflict his creatures with this calamity; and when they do not specify the grounds of the Lord's controversy, as in Jer. xlix. they leave no room to doubt that God is justly displeased. Calamities may come upon individuals, not as judgements, but as trials. God was moved against Job to destroy him without cause: but he is never moved against whole nations, to punish them, till they have, by their wickedness, exposed themselves to his vengeance. We find, indeed, a singular complaint concerning public calamities, Psal. xliv. The church in that passage,

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complains that God had broken her in the place of dragons, and covered her with the shadow of death, although she had not dealt falsely in his covenant. But this complaint cannot be referred to any of those periods of time, of which the history is given us in the Old Testament. If it be referred to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the integrity of the people is to be understood only of the behaviour of that remnant which continued faithful to God, when great multitudes of the people adopted the superstitions of the Greeks, to please their tyrant. If we refer it to the days of Christianity, as Paul does, Rom. viii. 36. the complaint respects, not rational calamities, but those distresses which Divine Providence brought upon his own peculiar people for their good.

We must be wilfully blind to our own behaviour, and to the behaviour of men of all ranks in the nation, if we doubt whether God has just reason, for our sins at present, not only to threaten, but to punish us with his vengeance. We ought to wonder at his forbearance, that he has not long since caused the sword to reach unto the whole of the nation, to avenge the quarrel of his covenant.

3. The probable or possible consequences of these alarms of war ought to come under our view, when we hear the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war.

We cannot, indeed, tell with certainty what will be the event of the present dispute; but we know what miseries this scourge of war has brought upon nations, in former times, and in our own times. The scripture often calls upon us to learn from the

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fate of other nations, what we may expect when God rises up out of his place to punish us for our transgressions. We have long enjoyed peace within our borders; and therefore we are disposed to think, that we shall never see garments rolled in blood. But what nation ever enjoyed perpetual peace? The sea did not always preserve our fathers from successful invasions. The Romans, and after them the Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans, conquered the south parts of Britain, and spread slaughter and desolation, misery and horror, amongst its inhabitants. A considerable part of North Britain was frequently desolated by the English. Through the mercy of God, we have enjoyed tranquillity so long, that we seldom think of the affliction and the misery endured by the men who lived in ancient days; and I hope in God, that we will not see such times as have been sometimes seen even in this favoured island. Yet who can assure us that we shall be entirely exempted from sharing in those calamities which have afflicted many nations of Europe, even in our own days? Why are so vigorous preparations made for our defence, if there is no danger? You applaud the wisdom and activity of government, for putting the nation into such a state of preparation for an invading enemy. But in approving these measures, we condemn ourselves, if we are not prepared, according to the directions given us in the word of God, for those evils that may, for aught we know, befall ourselves.

We are not required, but forbidden, to take any anxious thought about the things of to-morrow; but we are commanded to be prepared for meeting our God, when he threatens us with correction for our

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iniquities. We know not what evil shall be on the earth, or what evil shall be in our land; but "the prudent man foreseeth the evil" that may come, "and hideth himself."

We know not what God will be pleased to do; but we know what our sins deserve, and, through the mercy of God, we are informed how those evils which we deserve may be averted. When we make that preparation which religion enjoins against possible evils, if these evils should not overtake us, we are no losers, but gainers. The fear of evil has often been productive of much good. "Happy is the man who feareth always," and especially in times when there is peculiar cause of fear; "but he who hardeneth his heart, shall fall into mischief."

II. I NOW consider the impression which the sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war, ought to make upon us.

The bowels of the prophet were sore pained within him. He had a promise given him, (either before or after the time that he wrote these words), that "verily it should be well with him, and that the enemy should intreat him well in the day of evil, and in the day of affliction." But his love was not confined to himself. He wept bitterly, and refused to be comforted, because of the miseries that were to come upon his people. To selfish men all is well, when themselves are well. Those who love their neighbours as themselves, cannot be happy when they are surrounded with objects of pity; and therefore they are never to expect perfect happiness in this world,

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world, and must, in days of public misery, feel many pangs to which others are strangers.

1. Those external scenes of distress which are the consequences of war, must give pain to an heart that is not contracted and hardened by a reigning selfishness of spirit. Such scenes presented themselves to the prophet's mind, at the time when he published this prophecy; and they struck horror into the minds of all the remnant of the people, when they were realized by Divine Providence. "Even the sea-monsters draw out the breast," says the prophet in his Lamentations, "they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst; they ask bread, and no man breaketh it to them." The whole book of the Lamentations is an affecting picture of the miseries attendant upon war, in the days of the prophet. God forbid that we should ever see such days as he beheld; and yet it is not long since such days were seen in a part of the United Kingdom. "Are there not with us, even with us, sins against the Lord our God?" If such events should befall us, as have befallen many parts of Europe, and some parts of Asia and Africa, within our remembrance, we should have no reason to complain of unrighteousness with God.

2. Souls precipitated into an eternal world, must awaken awful sensations in those who believe, that when the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it.

How precious is the soul of man! Jesus gave his own blood as a ransom for souls. How precious is

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the time of preparation that God gives us for our entrance into a world where there are no changes from evil to good! The eternal welfare or misery of the meanest soldier that exposes himself to jeopardy in the high places of the field, is of infinitely greater importance than the rise or fall of the kingdoms of this world.

We rejoice when we hear of victories gained by our fleets and armies. We ought, indeed, to rejoice in God's goodness to our nation. Wars are too often necessary, and victories in just wars are great grounds of thanksgiving to the Almighty, "who giveth deliverance to kings." But whether battles are gained or lost, hundreds or thousands of our fellow-men are cut off from all further opportunities of hearing the gospel, from all further space of repentance. God "will not stretch forth his hand to the grave, although they cry in his destruction," Job, xxx. 24.

How great is that mercy which gives to sinners space for repentance! What have the rulers of the world to answer for, who, by wars that might be avoided, shorten the space of repentance to many of their subjects? and what tears are sufficient to deplore the fate of those unhappy men who thought but little of the eternal world in the time of their prosperity, and are chased from this world, without time allowed them to lift up a single desire of their hearts to the God of mercy! Let rumours of war urge your flight, O sinners! from the wrath of God, to that refuge which is set before you in the gospel. Then you will have no great reason to dread the most cruel enemies. They can only kill your bodies. Your souls

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souls will be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord your God.

3. The influence that wars may have upon the interests of religion, is a source of anxious concern to the lovers of God.

In the Lamentations of Jeremiah for the ravages of his country, we find him bewailing, with bitter tears, the desolations of their sanctuary, and the long intermission of their holy services, in which the holy men of ancient times placed their delight. "Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction, and of her miseries, all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.—He hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly. The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion; and hath despised, in the indignation of his anger, the king and the priest. The Lord hath cast off his altar; he hath abhorred his sanctuary. He hath given up into the hand of the enemy, the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast. The law is no more: her prophets find no vision from the Lord," Lam. i. 9. ii. 6. 7. 9.

New-Testament institutions are not, like some of the ancient institutions, confined to particular places; yet religious ordinances cannot be observed without distraction, amidst the alarms of war. The examples of profligate soldiers, of whom too many are to be found in every nation, are of a corrupting influence. Amidst

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Amidst the ravages of war, even in our own times, we have too often heard of the alienation or destruction of houses ordinarily employed in the services of religion. Should God, in his wrath, refuse us his help against those who threaten the subversion of our liberties, who can foresee what dismal consequences in the state of religion would ensue? It is the boast of the present age, to allow religious liberty in its utmost extent, to all peaceable members of society. But very different views are entertained concerning the rights of conscience, and its liberty may be cruelly invaded by men who intend, perhaps, no more than the preservation of their own authority in civil matters. If the news-writers give us a just account of the liberty allowed to Protestants in France, it extends, indeed, to the ordinances of worship, but not to those which respect the government and discipline of the church. Church-courts must meet only when the First Consul pleases, and their decisions must be subjected to his review. Our consciences, duly instructed, must impel us to observe pure and entire the ordinances of church-government and discipline, as well as the ordinances of Christian worship. So we are taught in the second commandment, as it is explained in the received standards of our church. If our government allowed us no more liberty of conscience than is allowed by the government of France, according to this account of it, I would probably consider it as my duty to seek liberty of conscience in a foreign land.

4. God's indignation, apparent in the alarms of war, ought to impress every mind with deep concern.

When God causes his face to shine upon his people, it is not difficult for them to endure the strokes of his

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his hand. But they tremble at the thought of rebukes in God's anger, and chastisements in his hot displeasure. Jeremiah, in the name of the church, earnestly deprecates such corrections: "O Lord, rebuke me, but with judgement, not in thine indignation, lest thou bring me to nothing."

Nothing can be a sign of a more hardened spirit, than a mind tranquil and fearless under plain evidences of divine displeasure, whether against the whole land, or against individuals. "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? The lion hath roared, who will not fear?" What is the roaring of a lion to the least indications of the wrath of God? "If he giveth quietness, who can make trouble? If he hideth his face, who then can behold him, whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only?"

III. I PROCEED now to show what improvement is to be made of the sound of the trumpet, and of the alarm of war.

You that have undertaken to bear arms in the defence of your country, did well in showing your readiness to march at the first appearance of danger. You are entitled to thanks from us all, for your chearful appearance at your standards, in the day when danger was apprehended. Enlisted in the service of your king, you must still be ready to obey his commands, intimated by the officers set over you. But remember, that the God of heaven is entitled to a readier and more implicit obedience than any king upon earth. You are disloyal and mutinous, if you

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refuse to march when you are called by your officers, who have the king's commission to require and direct your service. You are impious, if you refuse to hear the voice of God crying to you in his word and providence, to depart from all iniquity, and to make God himself your refuge in the time of danger.

But I address myself to all in general, and call upon you,

1. To consider your ways, and to inquire how far you are chargeable with those provocations of the divine majesty, which expose us to danger from our enemies. We ought to mourn for the sins of the land; and, alas! whithersoever we turn our eyes, we will see, that, if our heads were waters, we could not sufficiently bewail, with our tears, the sins that may justly bring upon us the punishment of the sword. But, let us begin with ourselves. We must be candid and cautious in judging others, strict in judging ourselves, that we may not be judged.

Nothing can be a more dangerous symptom, in the time of public danger, than self-conceit. "I will plead with thee," says God to his ancient people, "because thou sayest, I have not sinned." When God threatens judgements, he observes our behaviour. He returns and repents, when men are ready to acknowledge their offences, and to forsake them: but, woe to those who are at ease in their sins, and never inquire what are the causes of the Lord's contendings with them. "I have hearkened and heard," says God by Jeremiah, "but they spake not aright. No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" God expected that they would each say, What have I done? but there was none that used

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used this penitent language. They all took it for granted, either that it was a chance which happened to them, or that, if sin was the cause of their misery, it was not their own sin, but the sins of other men, Jer. iii. 13. viii. 6.

Do not think that your religious professions and practice is a sufficient proof of your own innocence. Remember what our prophet says, chap. vi. 20. "To what purpose cometh there unto me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me."

To endeavour to reconcile religion with the indulgence of some favourite lust, is an attempt to reconcile Christ with Belial. The provocations of those who, by profession and the enjoyment of external privileges, are God's sons and daughters, are, above all others, offensive and dishonourable to him. The eyes of his glory are provoked by those who draw near to him with their mouths, and rebel against him in their ordinary practice. Moses, by the spirit of prophecy, tells us, that when his people forgot the Lord that formed them, "The Lord saw it, and was displeased because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters, and he said, I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be."

2. We ought to humble ourselves before God, on account of our iniquities. An unaffecting apprehension of our iniquities is a token of extreme hardness of heart. To confess our sins without sorrow for the offence we have given to God, is not to honour God, but to insult him. Observe in what manner Ezra and Daniel bewailed and confessed their own iniquities, and

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the iniquities of their people, Ezra, ix. Dan. ix. They presented unto God, in their confessions, the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. "A broken and a contrite heart, thou, O Lord, wilt not despise." How well God was pleased with the contrition of these holy men, is apparent from the commission which he gives them to record their penitent confessions in his word as a pattern to us.

It is reckoned a very unpleasant exercise to mourn; and yet it is more unpleasant not to mourn, when there is good reason for it. What would we think of a child that did not mourn when his father was justly displeased with him? We would think that he was cursed with a disposition that totally disqualified him for enjoying the sweetest pleasures that man can taste. By this similitude the scripture teaches us, how unnatural a thing insensibility to the chastisements of the divine hand ought to be reputed, Numb. xii. 14.

Isaiah speaks of an awful day in Jerusalem, when there was a greater concourse to the house-tops than we saw in our streets on the night of our alarm. The people not only heard of invaders, but saw them in the vicinity of their capital. "Elam bare the quiver, and Kir uncovered the shield. The choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gates; for it was a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity from the Lord God of hosts, in the valley of vision." Mighty preparations were made for the defence of the city; but there was one kind of preparation miserably neglected: and God was so highly displeased, that he would not turn away his wrath from those who were chargeable with the omission. "In that

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day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." What was the harm of killing sheep and oxen, and eating their flesh? Did not God give all Noah's posterity, with himself, a right to eat flesh? True. But there is a time to eat, and a time to fast; a time to rejoice, and a time to mourn; a time to feast, and a time to refrain from feasting. If we indulge ourselves in intemperate eating and drinking at any time, God is highly displeased with our abuse of his good creatures. If we employ that time in riotous eating of flesh, and in drinking wine out of bowls, which we are loudly called by God to employ in mourning for our sins, we walk contrary to God, and provoke him to walk contrary to us. "It was revealed in mine ears," says the prophet, "by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die, saith the Lord God of hosts."

The people of Israel, in the days of Amos, were no less devoted to intemperance, and unseasonable pleasures, than the men of Judah. The chiefs of the two nations to whom the house of Israel came, were at ease, and lived in pleasure; drinking wine in bowls, and anointing themselves with the chief ointments, and inventing to themselves instruments of music, like David. What was the consequence of their licentious mirth, in the time of the affliction of Joseph? "They shall go captive, saith the Lord, with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretch themselves shall be removed."

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These men were very unlike Uriah. He would not so much as go to his own house to enjoy lawful domestic pleasures, whilst his lord Joab, and Israel, lay in tents at the siege of Rabbah, 2 Sam. xii.

If you refuse to humble yourselves under the hand of God, he can easily humble you by his providence. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Woe to them that laugh" at the time when God loudly calls them to mourning, "for their joy shall be turned into heaviness."

I cannot, at present, enlarge upon the many causes for mourning, which we will find, upon a due examination of our own ways, and a candid observation of the ways of all ranks of men in our nation. Consider the causes for which God punished sinful nations in ancient times. Has he not the same or like causes to punish us? Swearing, lying, stealing, and committing adultery, murder, licentious revellings, pride, abundance of idleness, are every where to be seen.

Consider the aggravations of our sins. We have broken the most sacred engagements, of a public or private nature. We have dealt ungratefully with a gracious God, who has been the saviour of Britain in times past. The light of the knowledge of God, and of his gospel, and of his law, shines clearly in our land. But neither the wrath revealed against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men, nor the rich grace revealed in the gospel, have been sufficient to restrain us from the works of iniquity.

Consider the causes for which Christ threatened his judgements to the churches of Ephesus, of Sardis, of Laodicea. Have we not degenerated from our

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first love, that love to the truths, the ordinances, the ways of Christ, that operated powerfully upon our fathers, in different periods of the reformation? The church of Ephesus laboured much, and discovered much patience and steadiness in the cause of Christ; and yet because she left her first love, he threatened to remove her candlestick out of its place. But it is to be feared, that we are chargeable with the defects, and have little claim to the commendations of this church. Are we not more like to the churches of Sardis or Laodicea? God might justly inflict upon us all those judgements that came upon the churches of Asia for their defections. "All the churches shall know," says Christ, "that I am he which searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins, to give to every man according to his work." Let us humble ourselves to the dust, and confess that it is owing to his infinite patience, that the sword has not already been bathed in our blood.

3. Supplications for pardoning and reforming grace, ought to accompany our humiliation. When Amos had a view of some terrible judgements presented before his eyes, he said, "Forgive, O Lord! By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?" and the Lord repented at the voice of his supplication: "This shall not be," said the Lord. In the whole history of Israel, we find that the Lord is a God of pardons. How often did he forgive the sins of his people, and turn away from the fierceness of his wrath at the voice of supplications! Exod. xxxii. Neh. ix. 17.

We ought to pray, not only that judgements may be averted, but that all ranks may be turned to the Lord, by the power of him who turns away ungodliness

liness from Jacob. "Turn us, and we shall be turned. Turn us, O God of our salvation! and cause thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be safe."

Who knows what God may do in answer to the prayers of one, or of many of his humble petitioners? God hath not forbidden us, as he did Jeremiah, to lift up prayers to him, for the people amongst whom we dwell. We are greatly encouraged to pray, by the many examples of successful petitioners for public mercies in scripture. The ways of God are everlasting. He delights in mercy. He puts words into our mouth for imploring his mercy. He hath left us many promises of merciful returns to our prayers, that we may be encouraged to come boldly to his throne of grace for mercy to ourselves, to our friends and brethren, to the church, to our king and country.

There is, however, one pattern of praying which we find twice in scripture, and which I dare not recommend to your imitation: "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name." I am afraid, such a petition in our mouths would be a prayer against many of ourselves. But when will men learn to pray, if they seek not God in the time of public danger? If kings, and all that are in authority, are entitled at all times to our prayers, ought we not to pray earnestly for them, when the stability of government is threatened by a nation that has destroyed its own king, and weakened the power of others? Ought we not to pray for those men that must jeopard their lives, or that may yet be called to expose themselves

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to jeopardy, by sea or land, for our safety? Ought we not to pray with earnestness and importunity, that God's anger may be turned away from our nation, and that he may establish our Jerusalem, and make her a praise in the earth? The ancient Israelites, though always disposed to revolt from God in the time of prosperity, were not so hardened as to think themselves above the need of God's help in the time of their distresses. They poured out prayers when God's chastening was upon them. If, through the pride of our faces, we refuse to call upon God, we are worse than heathens. The men of Nineveh cried mightily unto the Lord, when they heard a foreign prophet proclaim destruction to their city. The name of Christ was unknown to them, and yet they were roused to prayer by a sense of danger. We know the Mediator, through whom our prayers may be offered up to God with acceptance. In his blessed name, let us supplicate that mercy to ourselves, and to the land of our nativity, which alone can preserve us in the evil day. "Cause thy face to shine upon thy city, and thy sanctuary, for the Lord's sake. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O our God!"

4. We are warned by the sound of the trumpet, and the alarms of war, to make God our refuge, and the Most High our habitation.

Where shall we be safe in the evil day? To what place of the island, or of the world, shall we flee? There is no fortress that can defend us against the judgements of an angry God. We must flee unto God himself. David used every mean of safety in the

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the time of his persecution. He sought protection from the fury of his enraged enemy in caves or rocks; but the Lord was his only confidence. The deepest caves, he knew, could not hide him, the strongest munitions could not protect him, if God was not his defence. What time he was afraid, he trusted in God, and he was not confounded, Psal. xviii. xxxi. 21. 22.

"Some trust in horses, and some in chariots," says the psalmist, "but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." Some at present talk of the greatness of our naval and military preparations, of the order and invincible bravery of our forces. If the enemy should make good their landing, say they, it will terminate in our glory. But how do they know this? Is the race always to the swift, and the battle to the strong, and success in enterprises to men of skill? "Great hosts save not a king," says the holy psalmist; "a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety." If men will not believe the Bible, why will they not believe their own eyes? Do they not see in their own affairs, and in the affairs of their friends and neighbours, plain proofs that there is a Divine Providence, which manages all affairs, great and small; and that nothing can be more foolish than for any man to say what will be on the morrow, or a year hence?

To trust to ourselves is the fruit of atheism. If there is a God, he rules in the army of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of the earth; and he does according to his pleasure. He sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are

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as grasshoppers. He bringeth the princes of the earth to nought; he maketh its judges as vanity.

One cause of the ruin of the kingdom of Ephraim was, the confidence which the people reposed in themselves. They had gained great victories, and acquired a great accession of territory, in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. From that time they hastened to destruction. "Ye which rejoice in a thing of nought," said God, "which say, Have we not taken to ourselves houses by our own strength? But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel! saith the Lord, the God of hosts, and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the river of the wilderness;" from the northern to the southern limits of the kingdom.

Asa had a mighty army, yet he found it unequal to the great host which was brought against him by Zerah, the king of Ethiopia. A Roman or a Grecian hero, in his place, would have thought a few hundreds of their own patriotic citizens a match for as many thousands of their enemies. Asa was perhaps as brave a man as some of the celebrated commanders of Greece or Rome; but his bravery was regulated and animated by true piety. He knew that the success of armies, and the issue of all battles and wars, depended on the good pleasure of God, to whom it is nothing to save, either by many, or by them that have no strength. In the name of his God he trusted, and gained a glorious victory, 2 Chron. xiv. 11. 12.

Asa and David, you will say, were eminent favourites of Heaven, and wonders were done for them, that will not be renewed for our benefit. But why does God record the wonders shewn for his ancient

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people? Is it not to encourage his people, in every succeeding age, to place their confidence in him? The Lord Jehovah is the Rock of ages; his arm is never shortened, his ear is never heavy.

'But the name of the Lord is a strong tower of defence,' some may say, 'only for the righteous, Prov. xviii. 10. And we are conscious of so many evils, that we have no reason to hope for protection from the Holy One, who takes no pleasure in wickedness, and will not suffer evil to dwell with him.' It is true, the Lord our God is holy; but it is true likewise, that he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. He calls upon sinners to come to him through Christ Jesus, that they may find safety under the shadow of his wings. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous will run into it, and be safe." They are the persons whom God has taught to place their confidence in him; but sinners likewise are assured of safety when they come to Christ. "Him that cometh unto me," says Jesus, "I will in no wise cast out."

You have perhaps heard some ridiculous stories of men, that, by some magical secret, were rendered invulnerable in battle. You would not be afraid to encounter the most formidable armies, if you were masters of such a secret; but, if thou canst believe, "all things are possible to him that believeth." "He that liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." Who is he that can kill those who cannot die? The words, you will say, must be figuratively understood; for who is the man that liveth, and shall not see death? But, however they are to be understood, they are true and faithful sayings of the Amen, the faithful and

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true Witness, of him that liveth, and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and holds the keys of the spiritual world, and of death.

David believed in God, and in the promised Redeemer. "The Lord," he says, "is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, mine heart shall not fear."

As the harp of David chased away the evil spirit from Saul, the sweet songs of that holy man will drive away fears and inquietudes from every heart that confides in the faithfulness of their divine Author. What Goliaths, what devils can hurt us, if we dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty?

You are called to mourning in days of danger, but not to that kind of mourning which swallows up the soul. You are called to mourn, that you may rejoice; to be afflicted for your sins, that you may flee from wrath to Christ, and find in him safety, security, and joy.

"When I heard," says the prophet Habakkuk, "my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble; when he cometh up to the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation," Hab. iii. 16.—18.

5. The sound of the trumpet, and the alarm of war, is a loud call to us to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well. Our faith in God is a delusion, if we hold fast our iniquities. Our faith in Christ, if it is genuine, will purify our hearts and lives.

"It came to pass, when the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, for the time was long, that all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord; and Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your heart, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from amongst you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines." Idolatry was the sin by which most of all the people of that age had provoked the Lord. Ashtaroth, it is likely, was then their favourite idol. If they wished for deliverance from the Philistines, they must cast away all their abominations. They must cast away, with extreme detestation, that idol to which they had been most attached, and prepare their hearts to serve their own God only. David tells us, that his wonderful deliverance from the hands of all his enemies was the gracious reward of his righteousness. And what was the righteousness which God so highly approved? "I was upright before him," says the holy man, "and I kept myself from mine iniquity." He was most careful to keep himself from that iniquity, which, in a special sense, was his own. Thus he approved his uprightness before God; and God's dealings with David teach us, what expectations we may form of God's dealings either with men of a like, or with men of an opposite temper, Psal. xviii. 20.—27.

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Some of you are servants to the king, and under engagements to fight his battles, if you are called to the field. Let not your behaviour be such as may, in the day of battle, damp your courage. You have heard of the fabulous story of a ghost that appeared to the famous Marcus Brutus, and told that commander, that he would meet him again at Philippi, where he was afterwards to fight a battle, decisive of his own fate, and the fate of his country. The most terrible apparitions in the world are a man's own sins, brought to his recollection in a time of trouble and danger. Beware of actions that may meet your consciences in the day of battle. Ten thousand enemies set in array against you will be less dreadful than one sin unrepented of, and unpardoned.

But all of us are called to keep ourselves from every evil thing at all times, and especially when our armies go out to battle, Deut. xxiii. 9. Why should we fight against our own defender? We fight against them, if we provoke God, by our sins, to with-hold his help from them. Achan committed sacrilege, and many of the men of Israel fell down slain before the men of Ai, although we do not find that Achan was in the battle; nor could the armies of Israel go forth again to the war, till the accursed thing was taken away from amongst them.

Many are terrified when they hear of the immense multitude of our enemies. One sin is more formidable than ten thousands of enemies, who can only kill the body, and who cannot even do so much without permission from God.

We are exposed to danger, not only from our own personal sins, but from the sins of our fellow-subjects; and

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and therefore we ought not only to forsake sin, but to use all our influence to turn other sinners from the error of their ways. It is a righteous thing with God, that those who do not duly oppose the prevalence of sin, should share in the miseries which it brings.

We ought not only to renounce all iniquity, but to live in the habitual practice of every duty which God requires. When we do not endeavour to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God, we sin by the neglect of the duties which God enjoins: "Seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgements. Seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger."

Satisfy not yourselves with resolutions to do what God requires. When the people of Israel said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do," the Lord said, "O that there were such an heart in them!" Seek from God new hearts and new spirits. It is only by his grace that we can either will or do what is good.

Think not that the exhortations addressed to you might have been spared, because our late alarm was groundless. Our danger is not at an end, nor, though an enemy should never appear on our coasts, will our repentance be useless. The Lord's voice was to us. Nineveh was not destroyed at the time spoken of by Jonah, and yet you will not say that the people of that place had cleansed their hands in vain, when they turned from the violence that was in their hands. They will rise up in judgement against those who call themselves Christians, and yet will not be persuaded, by a thousand sermons, and by many warnings from the providence of God, to turn from their iniquities.

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The French may never be able to prosecute their designs. God grant they may not. But there is another enemy whom we must all encounter, and by his stroke we must fall. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death; and there is no discharge in that war." Happy are those alarms, well or ill grounded, that awaken us to prepare for our encounter with the king of terrors. Happy are they whom the grace of God disposes to flee from the wrath to come: "O death!" may such persons say, "where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?"

You have heard the sound of a trumpet blown by mortal breath. But you are one day to hear the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, calling the dead to arise and come to judgement. Be diligent, therefore, that ye may be found of your Judge in peace, without spot, and blameless.

"Behold I come," says our Lord, "as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. Behold, I come quickly. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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